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Free to Deployed Areas

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Vets to Congress: Don't forget us

Advocates worry that cuts to retirement benefits are just the beginning

By LEO SHANE III
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — With Congress back this week, veterans groups are vowing to resume their fight against trims to military retirement benefits.

But what they're really fighting for is relevancy, and to make sure the country hasn't forgotten about them.

Military advocates worry that Congress's willingness to attack veterans' retirement

'Lawmakers go after military personnel when the wars end because they've become an easy target. I think it's a national disgrace.'

Jack Klump
National Association for Uniformed Services president

checks shows that lawmakers — and perhaps the public — have already moved on from the wars of the last decade, and that the sacrifices and promises made will be forgotten.

"This is what happens when you have an unengaged population whose focus starts to shift away," said Tom Tarantino, chief policy officer for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans

of America. "When times get tough, people say everyone has to sacrifice. But not everyone has been sacrificing for the last 10 years."

The cut is a 1 percent trim on cost-of-living increases for working-age military retirees. Veterans 62 and older won't see any changes. But those younger — including medically retired servicemembers — will see their annual increases trimmed starting in January 2016.

SEE CUTS ON PAGE 2

Shared sorrow

Investigators seek cause of helicopter crash that killed 4 US airmen | Page 7



ADAM L. MATHIS/Stars and Stripes

Flowers lie near one of RAF Lakenheath's gates on Thursday in remembrance of the four airmen killed in an HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter crash near Salthouse, England. Investigators are looking into the cause of the crash.

Army inactivating 5 of 29 Warrior Transition Units

By CHRIS CARROLL
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — With the pace of U.S. operations in Afghanistan slowing and fewer wounded troops coming home, the Army said Thursday it would eliminate some of the

special units for soldiers who need long-term medical care and rehabilitation.

The Army plans to inactivate five of its 29 active-duty Warrior Transition Units by the end of September.

In the wake of a scandal over poor living conditions for some

wounded warriors, the units were set up in the United States and Europe in 2007, designed to oversee care for those who need at least six months of recovery time before returning to their Army jobs or transitioning to the civilian world.

The Army also will close all

nine Community Based Warrior Transition facilities, non-residential units that primarily serve National Guard and reserve troops regionally. They'll be replaced with 13 new Community Care Units on active-duty Army bases.

SEE UNITS ON PAGE 8

QUOTE
OF THE DAY

"They told us, 'Don't go out! The fleet is here!'"

— Marijo Resinas Verano, a resident of Rota, Spain, describing her parents' warning about the arrival in 1964 of swarms of U.S. sailors as the installation there expanded

See story on Page 4

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COMING
SOON

Science & Medicine

Emotions move us in the same places

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MILITARY

Cuts: Congress urged to make repeal a top priority

FROM FRONT PAGE

The cut will save about \$6.3 billion over 10 years and was included as part of a budget deal designed to avert another government shutdown.

Lawmakers who backed the deal bemoaned the military retirement changes but said fixing the problem later was preferable to jeopardizing budget harmony now. At least 14 separate bills to repeal the cut have been introduced in the two weeks since the deal passed.

In the last week, editorial boards at USA Today and The Washington Post have called the veterans' opposition out of touch, noting that the military's generous retirement benefits aren't comparable to any private-sector pensions.

Veterans groups argue that work is underway in the form of a compensation commission, which is reviewing large-scale changes to military pay and benefits.

They thought lawmakers had agreed not to make any changes until after that panel's recommendations were completed by February 2015 and had agreed that only changes to new retirees' benefits would be considered.

"This caught us by surprise," said Jack Klump, president of the National Association for Uniformed Services. "And that's always the danger we face — that politicians will forget the promises they make."

The budget deal was the culmination of two months of work by budget committee chairmen Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash.

Ryan said last week that Defense Department leaders proposed the retirement cut. Murray said she disliked the retirement cut but believed that averting more fiscal brinkmanship and another government shutdown was the top goal for all Americans, including

Lawmakers look to replace cost-of-living cuts

Congress passed its new budget deal less than three weeks ago, but lawmakers already have rushed new legislation to undo major portions of it. Here's a look at some of the ideas that would replace the military retirement cost-of-living cuts included in the plan:

■ End Saturday mail delivery (Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif.).

■ Crack down on fraudulent claims for child tax credits (Reps. Rodney Davis, R-Ill., and Michael Fitzpatrick, R-Pa.).

■ Reduce foreign aid to Egypt and Pakistan (Rep. Ted Poe, R-Texas).

veterans. Both lawmakers have promised to find fixes in the coming months, including exempting disabled veterans from the cost-of-living trims.

In the days before the budget deal vote, a number of the veterans group leaders were agitated at having been left out of the budget discussions, railing against lawmakers in press conferences and muttering stronger insults from the sidelines.

Tarantino believes the reason that veterans groups were kept in the dark is simple. "They knew we would be a huge problem," he said. "We would have worked to scuttle the deal, or at least that part, before they got it out."

Visits to Capitol Hill offices produced only promises of corrections later and not the immediate rejection that the veterans lobbyists wanted.

The Military Officers Association of America estimates the retirement change will cost a typical enlisted member who retires at 40 about \$83,000 over 20 years, and cost a typical retired officer more than \$124,000 over 20 years. That's based on an estimated re-

■ Mandate joint prescription drug purchases for the departments of defense and veterans affairs (Rep. James Kankard, R-Okla.).

■ End tax loopholes for offshore corporations (Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii; Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H.; Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va.; Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va.).

■ Just repeat it, without any offsets (Rep. Julia Brownley, D-Calif.; Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla.; Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Va.; Rep. Scott DesJarlais, R-Tenn.; Sen. Kay Hagan, D-N.C.; Sen. Mark Pryor, D-Ark.).

tirement package totaling about \$1 million over that span.

Last month, lawmakers also approved a 1 percent military pay raise for 2014, the lowest annual bump since the start of the all-volunteer force.

"We've seen this before, where lawmakers go after military personnel when the wars end because they've become an easy target," Klump said. "I think it's a national disgrace."

Unlike in recent sessions, Congress failed to pass any sweeping veterans legislation last year, including measures backed by veterans groups on expanding GI Bill benefits and providing advance funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs. It's unclear whether that's a reflection of groups' waning influence or the partisan gridlock.

Officials at Student Veterans of America have warned that lawmakers are eyeing the costs of veterans education benefits for savings initiatives. Groups lobbying the military compensation commission have also predicted dramatic cuts to active-duty and retirement benefits.

Congress has provided steady increases to the VA budget since the start of the war in Afghanistan, but leaders worry how long that generosity will last.

For now, the focus is on repealing the military retirement cut. Even with two years before it goes into effect, opponents are saying they might not have enough time to change it.

It's unclear which, if any, of the repeal bills pending in Congress might pass. Several have no spending offsets, which usually spells quick defeat in the Republican House. Others make up the \$6 billion-plus in cuts with politically tricky proposals: ending tax loopholes, cutting foreign aid, ending Saturday postal delivery.

Senate Armed Services Chairman Carl Levin, D-Mich., has promised hearings on the issue, and the veterans affairs committees are expected to take up the topic as well.

Mike Hayden, director of MOA's government relations, worries that if Congress doesn't move quickly on the issue — with weeks — it won't get fixed any time soon.

He pointed to the mandatory budget cuts put in place under sequestration in August 2011. Lawmakers spent two years denouncing the across-the-board cuts as terrible policy but failed to pass any meaningful legislation before the cuts went into effect.

"Congress recently has been good at getting things done at the 11th hour, but not before," Hayden said. "We don't want that again. We'd like to put this behind us before we get into the (fiscal 2015) budget discussions this spring. Otherwise, we don't know when they'll deal with it," he said.

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Report: Eisenhower officer relieved of duty

The commanding officer of a squadron assigned to the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower has been relieved of duty following a Navy investigation, WVEC.com reported.

A Judge Advocate General Manual investigation found that

Cmdr. Joe V. Martinez, a commanding officer of Electronic Attack Squadron 140, made inappropriate racial comments, gave false and misleading information and knowingly submitted inaccurate officer fitness reports, among other issues, according to the TV station.

Cmdr. Scott Hardy will be the interim commanding officer.

1 still missing in Navy helo crash that killed 2

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. — The search continued Thursday for a sailor who has been missing since a Navy helicopter with five crew members aboard crashed in the ocean off the Virginia coast.

Two people died in the Wednesday crash, which happened during

a routine training mission, and two others were hospitalized.

The Coast Guard searched for the missing sailor by air and sea throughout the night and had crews on scene Thursday morning, said Petty Officer 1st Class Brandyn Hill. The Navy also was scheduled to send out two helicopters to assist with the search.

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STARS AND STRIPES



MILITARY

Hagel: Budget cuts won't affect wounded vets

By JON HARPER

Stars and Stripes

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Wounded veterans implored Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel during a town hall meeting Wednesday not to cut health care and other benefits for servicemembers and veterans.

Retired Sgt. Victor Rivera complained about the latest budget agreement reached by Congress which would cut the cost-of-living adjustment for younger veterans by 1 percent, effective in December 2015.

"Please don't take our money," Rivera told Hagel at the Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio.

"Let me assure you that all disabled will be exempt from any adjustments in the budget growth

to benefits," Hagel said. "We've got two years to fix that particular problem. It will be fixed."

Sgt. Maj. Clifford Lovejoy spoke highly of his experiences at Brooke and expressed concern about what would happen if the medical center lost Defense Department funding.

"We're not going to do anything that would inhibit the continued progress of this institution," Hagel said. "We're going to continue to make the kind of resource commitments that are required."

Hagel said some benefit cuts to servicemembers and veterans appear inevitable.

"The current set of obligations we have — based on what projections are out into the future — is most likely unsustainable," he told the crowd.

An elderly amputee expressed concern about the impact on younger veterans.

"Now, I'm pretty senior, so probably I'm OK," retired Col. Stan Thomas said. "But there's a lot of [younger] folks in this room that fall into another category. They're at risk."

Hagel was also asked about the deteriorating security situation in Iraq, and whether the sacrifices of those who took part in Operation Iraqi Freedom were in vain.

"In eight years we did accomplish what we set out to do," Hagel said. "If we analyzed what Iraq is today versus what Iraq was when we went into Iraq, it's a different country ..."

"You all did what you were asked to do, and I think you did it as well as it could have been done

... So I don't agree with the analyses that lives were wasted at all. I just — I don't think that's true, and I think it's unfortunate that there are people out there saying that."

Hagel earlier toured the medical center — one of the military's premier facilities — and met with patients and staff. Brooke houses DOD's only burn center and only Level I trauma center in the United States. Its Center for the Intrepid specializes in advanced rehabilitative care for wounded warriors and has fostered technological breakthroughs.

Hagel later flew to Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, N.M., where he met with base officials and toured Sandia National Laboratories, the engineering arm of the U.S. nuclear stockpile. Speak-

ing with reporters, he addressed former Defense Secretary Bob Gates' new memoir for the first time.

In the book, Gates is highly critical of President Barack Obama's handling of the war in Afghanistan and the White House's relationship with the military, according to journalists who were given pre-release copies. Gates led the Pentagon in 2006-11 during the Bush and Obama administrations.

Asked if it was inappropriate for a former defense secretary to publicly criticize the president he served, Hagel said, "I've never second-guessed motivations on why people do things ... I think it's up to each individual to make that judgment on his or her own."

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US watchdog issues alert over Afghan dam project oversight

By HEATH DRUZIN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL — The top U.S. government watchdog for Afghanistan has issued an alert over what he calls "possible weaknesses" in the oversight of a troubled dam project that has become a symbol of America's fraught reconstruction effort in Afghanistan.

A letter from Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John Sopko raises concerns about lack of vetting power and access to the Kajaki Dam for the U.S. Agency for International Development, which has pledged \$75 million in direct aid to Afghanistan's national power utility to install an additional turbine at the site in the volatile southern province of Helmand.

"I am concerned that these oversight provisions are not as robust as they should be, which could make these funds more vulnerable to waste, fraud, and abuse," Sopko wrote in a letter addressed to USAID chief Rajiv Shah and USAID's Afghanistan director, William Hammink.

In response to a Stars and Stripes query, Hammink said the safeguards Sopko is asking for are already in the contract.

USAID has pledged nearly \$340 million in direct assistance — meaning U.S. funds going directly to the Afghan government without the use of intermediaries — to Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat, Afghanistan's national utility. That includes the money for the turbine installation, intended to increase power production in southern Afghanistan.

The rest of the money is slated to go to the Power Transmission Expansion and Connectivity project, which is to improve Afghanistan's electrical transmission system.

According to Sopko, the PTEC money has more stringent oversight provisions than the money tied to the turbine, and he recommends adding those requirements to the turbine funds.

These are the three provisions from the PTEC contract Sopko recommended be added to the turbine contract:

- Under the PTEC agreement, USAID reviews all procurement actions, and the national utility must submit documentation related to contracting. USAID has the right to block procurement action if it has concerns about the documentation.

■ USAID has the right to vet organizations and individuals who may receive



MATT MILLHAM/Stars and Stripes

The Kajaki Dam and power station were begun by the U.S. in 1953 to bring development to southern Afghanistan. The dam has been turned over to Afghan control, but the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction has raised concern about "possible weaknesses" in the oversight of the project.

USAID funds related to the PTEC project.

■ USAID and its quality assurance contractor are guaranteed access to all Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat facilities, equipment and documents related to the PTEC project, including the utility's employees, authorized representatives, and organizations and people hired to work on the project.

Hammink contended that all three safeguards are already in the turbine contract.

■ USAID completely agrees with SIGAR's position that conditionals similar to those that govern the USAID PTEC

project should also apply to the agreements that govern the Kajaki Dam Unit 2 Project," Hammink said in a statement emailed in response to a Stars and Stripes query. "In fact, such oversight provisions are already embedded within existing Strategic Objective Grant Agreement (SOAG) documents and the (Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat) contract with the Kajaki Unit 2 Project contractor."

The Kajaki Dam was built by the U.S. in the 1950s. The planned installation of three new turbines in the 1970s was halted by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which turned into a nine-year war.

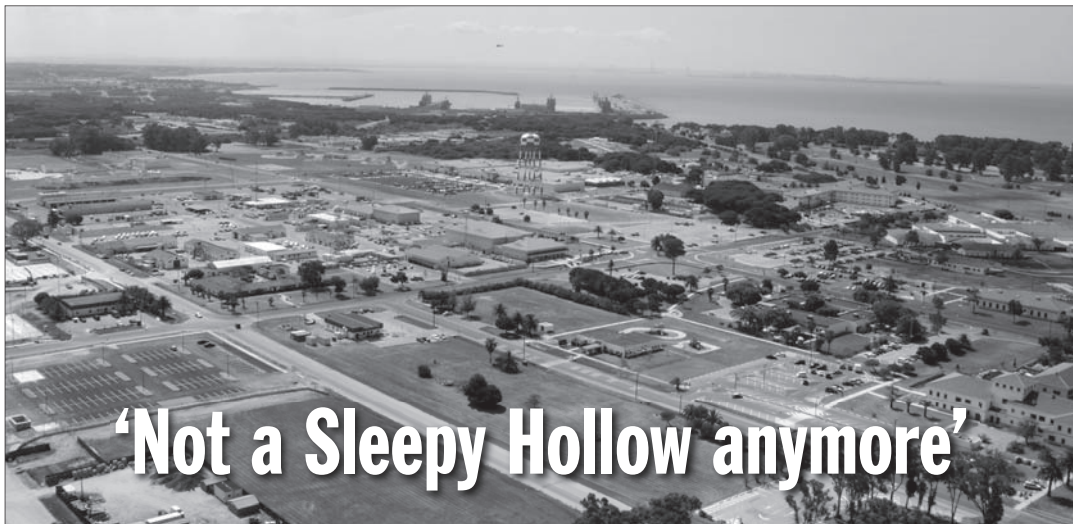
The dam sits in a violent corner of Helmand province, which has been, by far, the deadliest province for coalition troops in Afghanistan since the U.S.-led invasion of the country in October 2001.

The U.S. subsequently budgeted \$18 million for the third turbine, which was slated to be installed by 2005.

After going woefully over budget and taking years more than expected, USAID turned administration of the project over to the Afghan government last summer, but is still funding it.

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EUROPE



Courtesy of the U.S. Navy

'Not a Sleepy Hollow anymore'

Established in 1953, Naval Station Activity Rota was a Cold War submarine port and logistical way station at the western edge of the Mediterranean Sea.

Arrival of US missile destroyers to raise status of Rota, Mediterranean

By STEVEN BEARDSLEY
Stars and Stripes

ROTA, Spain — The former Cold War submarine base in sleepy town in southern Spain is about to experience a dramatic transformation — it will become the centerpiece of NATO's new ballistic missile defense shield stretching across southern and eastern Europe.

In February, the first of four U.S. Aegis missile destroyers, the USS Donald Cook, is scheduled to arrive here for permanent stationing. Another ship will come later in 2014, followed by two more in 2015. The Arleigh Burke-class ships, which are capable of shooting down ballistic missiles, will patrol the Mediterranean basin on four-month rotations on a mission to protect Europe from the threat of attack from Iran.

The program, known as the European Phased Adaptive Approach, is part of a wider NATO plan that includes land-based interceptor batteries in Romania and Poland and a radar system in Turkey. The plan has caused a major rift with Russia, which says the shield is aimed against its own nuclear missile arsenal.

Rota, located near the Strait of Gibraltar, will nearly double in population by the time the last ship arrives in 2015. The four vessels will bring more sailors and families to the town, as well as strategic significance as a base that is on the front lines of U.S. strategy in the region.

"We're not a Sleepy Hollow anymore," said base commanding officer Capt. Gregory S. Pekari.

Stationing the destroyers at Rota allows for their seamless rotation without draining manpower

because of long deployments from the United States, said Vice Adm. William Hunter Hilarides, head of the Naval Sea Systems Command.

"We've learned over a long time how long you can deploy people before they won't do it anymore," Hilarides said. "And so if you're going to have a lot of ships but still punch forward, punch above your weight forward, you've got to go change that dynamic."

The arrival of the ships coincides with increased U.S. interest in the Mediterranean and Africa, where an area of instability ranges from Syria to Egypt and across much of northern Africa, parts of which have become havens for militant groups. The Mediterranean also remains the gateway for U.S. deployments to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, where operations in Afghanistan and tensions with Iran have led to increased tours by carrier groups and smaller craft.

The four destroyers will significantly add to the number of ships controlled by the U.S. Sixth Fleet and U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa, a command that for years has had only its flagship, the USS Mount Whitney, as a permanent presence.

The U.S. established Rota in 1953 in a deal with Spanish dictator Francisco Franco in exchange for economic and military aid to the regime.

Located inside a 6,100-acre Spanish base on the Bay of Cadiz, the installation offered a way station for ships and aircraft transiting the Atlantic before entering the Mediterranean. In 1960, it received a squadron of Skywarrior reconnaissance jets.

Rota further expanded with

'If it wasn't for (the American presence), in winter, there would be no business.'

Juan Montoya Carpio
Manager of a restaurant
in downtown Rota, Spain

the arrival of the Polaris missile-wielding Submarine Squadron 16 from Charleston, S.C., in 1964.

With the growth of the base came an injection of American culture.

The first tattoo shop in the area opened soon after the first Americans came. Local bars filled with the arrival of ships, and residents watched as sailors flooded down Avenida San Fernando, the main drag between the base and downtown Rota. Marijo Resinas Verrano, who works for the town of Rota, remembered being warned by her parents as a teenager to stay inside.

"They told us, 'Don't go out! The fleet is here!'" she said, laughing.

But by 1979, the submarines had been redeployed to the U.S. East Coast. Anti-submarine and maritime patrol units continued, although the budget cuts of the 1990s slowed the pace of operations at Rota.

The base played a minor role in the logistical chain for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The military population began to fall in earnest in 2003 — having 12,000 personnel in the 1970s and '80s, Rota had dipped to 3,700 by 2008.

Fortunes outside the base fell about the same time. The global financial crisis revealed the country's troubled economy, forcing mortgages into foreclosure, businesses into bankruptcy and unemployment upward. The government cut military spending by 20 percent in the past four years.

It was against that dire backdrop that Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero in 2011 announced the agreement for Rota to host a component of NATO's new ballistic missile shield. The four Aegis ships would join a radar unit in Turkey and the future "Aegis Ashore" launching sites in Romania and Poland.

Among the benefits to the Spanish economy are a \$276 million maintenance contract for a state-owned ship builder, Cadiz-based Navantia. Other benefits are expected to trickle into the surrounding economy. Roughly 1,200 sailors and 1,800 family members are expected with the ships, officials here say.

Many of Rota's 25,000 residents say they know relatives or family members who are putting long-vacant apartments back onto the market for rent. They say businesses in the town depend in part on Americans at the base and that an increase in population could only improve the local economy.

"It's very fundamental here," Juan Montoya Carpio, a manager at a downtown restaurant, said about the American presence. "If it wasn't for them, in winter, there would be no business."

Municipal officials said they have prepared to welcome the new arrivals. Earlier this year, a delegation visited Ramstein, Germany, home of a massive U.S. air base, to share ideas with city offi-

cials there about managing community relations with Americans, according to the city's tourism director, Ana Luna Peña. They came back with the idea of creating an "Office of Cooperation," a meeting place for both Americans and Spaniards to find help in dealing with each other.

Town officials also invited Norfolk in the summer to hold a town hall meeting for the Donald Cook sailors and their families.

"The aim is for them to live here, for them to make their life here," Peña said.

On base, changes have been minor because the infrastructure was already in place for larger populations, said Pekari, the base commander.

"The infrastructure, including the commissary and the exchange, which is fairly new, was all built upon the premise of the previous population in 2003," he said.

Some construction around the pier, including a weapons magazine and a warehouse for equipment for destroyers, is planned for the near future, Pekari said. By the end of 2013, the biggest outward change included the arrival of a maintenance detachment in December.

Speaking at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the detachment last month, Hilarides said the move played a significant part in what was coming to Rota.

"Simply put, this detachment is a very, very important underpinning for a strategic shift for the United States Navy," he said.

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MILITARY

Gates' criticism highlights 'team of rivals' risk

Memoir calls to question Obama's alleged insular approach to his Cabinet

By SCOTT WILSON
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — In reminiscing about his time in office and the advice he has received along the way, President Barack Obama often cites an early warning passed on by the Washington veteran he decided to keep in his first Cabinet: Robert Gates.

"Every day," Gates told Obama in the first weeks of his presidency, "someone, somewhere, in the federal government is screwing up."

Now it turns out that Gates often believed that person was Obama — or, at least, some of those very close to him.

With the impending publication of a memoir that is critical of the president and some of his closest advisers, Gates has highlighted the risk Obama took by building a jostling, ambitious, big-intellect "team of rivals" to advise him.

The former defense secretary, a holdover from the Bush administration, has called into question Obama's commitment to his Afghan War policy, criticized how political calculation influenced national security decisions and complained about the president's distrust of the uniformed military command.

An exercise in therapeutic truth-telling, perhaps, but also rough and in some ways unexpected treatment from a former friend.

Even before official publication next week, the reputation of "Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War" is splitting along partisan lines, reinforcing and deepening the perceptions of the administration that have hardened over the years.

Conservatives see a politically motivated White House and a president who couldn't decide what to do in Afghanistan, choosing a half-measure and escape plan instead of a strategy to win. Liberals see a president unafraid of the military and eager to reflect the country's growing antiwar sentiment, focusing instead on economic problems at home.

In that sense, Obama probably faces little lasting political damage from the account. But there are other implications that go to the personality of this president and of his senior advisers.



Courtesy of the White House

President Barack Obama and then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates walk from the Oval Office to the Old Family Dining Room for a working lunch with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2009.

Since taking office, Obama and his most loyal inner circle, small and largely stagnant in composition over the years, have been accused of insularity at best, and a paranoid "us vs. them" mentality at worst.

Only veterans of Obama's U.S. Senate office or of his surprising victory in the 2008 Iowa caucuses were trusted implicitly as the administration took shape. Others — but only a very few others — worked their way in with loyalty and long hours.

But just as the Gates memoir is reinforcing partisan views about Obama, it may also serve as a kind of vindication of the opinion that only a select few longtime advisers can be trusted to serve him.

In the memoir, Gates writes that he was "put off by the way the president closed the meeting," referring to one devoted to Iran's nuclear program and Israel's concerns about it.

"To his very closest advisers, he said, 'For the record, and for those of you writing your memoirs, I am not making any decisions about Israel or Iran. Joe you be my witness,'" Gates writes of Obama. "I was offended by his suspicion that any of us would ever write about such sensitive matters."

White House officials say the feeling in the West Wing about Gates' assertions is a sense of dis-

appointment more than betrayal.

"The irony is that the very diverse range of views that have been represented in the national security team undermines the notion of insularity he writes about," one senior administration official said, requesting anonymity to speak about the internal process.

The official added, "You never know what somebody is going to say when they leave the adminis-

tration. But I can tell you that no one who has left a national security meeting in this White House has felt that the meeting went exactly their way."

"The importance of the process isn't that someone's opinion is adopted, but that it is heard," the official said.

"And if there's one thing that can be said about the Afghan review process, it's that everyone was heard."

Biden is defended by the White House

WASHINGTON — Current and former White House officials are defending Vice President Joe Biden against criticism by former Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who writes in his memoir that Biden was "wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades."

"The president and the rest of us here simply disagree with that assessment," White House press secretary Jay Carney said Wednesday.

Carney and former advisers to President Barack Obama also disputed Gates' assertion that Obama had lost confidence in his strategy for the conflict in Iraq and that White House aides tried to micromanage military affairs.

"I never heard him express those feelings to the president or to the situations that I was involved in and I think it's unfortunate," Bill Daley, Obama's former chief of staff, said about Gates on Wednesday on "CBS This Morning."

The White House received its copy of the book Tuesday night, Carney said. Wednesday, the White House took the unusual step of inviting photographers from news organizations into part of the weekly private lunch held by Obama and Biden. Carney said it was a coincidence.

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PACIFIC

Group wants Futenma returned to Okinawa

By ERIK SLAVIN
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — A group of prominent academics, filmmakers and activists is calling on the United States and Japan to return Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to Okinawa and scrap plans to build a replacement facility on the island.

The 29 signatories to a statement issued this week include filmmakers Oliver Stone and Michael Moore; professor and author Noam Chomsky; Nobel Peace Prize recipient Mairead Maguire; Pentagon Papers figure Daniel Ellsberg; and several academics and authors active in anti-nuclear and anti-war causes.

Their statement follows Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima's decision to sign off on landfill work that will allow a runway to be built in the island's remote Henoko district, despite local opposition to any plan that maintains the Marine helicopter base on Okinawa.

"We support the people of Okinawa in their non-violent struggle for peace, dignity, human rights and protection of the environment," according to the statement. "The Henoko marine base project must be canceled and Futenma returned forthwith to the people of Okinawa."

Japan and the U.S. have been trying since the 1990s to find a replacement for Futenma. Decades of growth in the surrounding city of Ginowan have left the base in the middle of a densely populated area. A helicopter crash in 2004 at a nearby university did not issue anyone on the ground, but it stoked continuing fears among island residents.

However, attempts to relocate the base offshore near Henoko has drawn criticism from ac-

tivists protesting both the U.S. military presence and the environmental impact of a new base at Oura Bay. In 2006, the two nations came up with a new plan to use landfill to connect a runway to existing land, but that too has been delayed by political opposition until now.

A telephone poll sponsored by three Japanese media outlets in mid-December — after news had circulated that Nakaima was leaning toward approving the permit — found that 64 percent of Okinawa residents opposed the Henoko plan. The same poll showed Nakaima's approval rating at 57 percent, an indication that the Henoko plan might not be the majority's foremost concern.

Joseph Gerson, one of the signers and a director of the American Friends Service Committee, told Stars and Stripes that the Henoko plans are part of a pattern of abuse of Okinawan rights that began during Japan's imperial past, then spanned the U.S. military occupation and subsequent reversion to Japan in 1972.

"Okinawans are being pressed to continue paying these prices and more for decades to come," Gerson said. "That is unacceptable."

Masashi Nishihara, president of the Research Institute for Peace and Security, a Tokyo think tank, called the signatories "irresponsible people" with a track record of criticizing the U.S. government for nearly everything. Nishihara said the prominence of the signatories concerned him enough to hope that U.S. officials would issue a rebuttal.

"If U.S. military withdrew from Okinawa, it would create enormous instability ... threatening the security of Japan, Okinawa and the entire region," he said.

The U.S. keeps a large military



GREG BAKER/AP

A C-130 transport plane taxis at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma on Okinawa in 2012. A group of activists and others want the U.S. to drop plans for a replacement facility on Okinawa.

force in Okinawa because of its proximity to nearly every potential hot spot in the western Pacific region. Jets can quickly reach Taiwan in the event of a clash with China, as well as South Korea if Pyongyang launches an attack. Navy vessels and aircraft can patrol the East and South China seas, where territorial disputes between China and several other nations have provoked maritime incidents and caused both China and Japan to scramble their fighter jets during the past year.

Marines based in Okinawa also regularly participate in aid missions to Southeast Asia, including relief operations in the Philippines in the aftermath of the dev-

astating Typhoon Haiyan.

The helicopters at Futenma transported those Marines and critical supplies. U.S. officials note that locating a Futenma replacement away from Okinawa would separate the Marines on Okinawa from their transport.

Last month, a senior Pentagon official called the Futenma replacement plan "the spine of the rebalance" of military forces in the Pacific. It is the first move in a plan that would send several thousand Marines — most of whom fulfill administrative functions — and their families, to Guam, lessening the military's large presence on the island.

Peter Kuznick, an American

University professor who signed the statement and co-authored "The Untold History of the United States" with Stone, said he believed not only that a Futenma replacement was unnecessary, but that troops on Okinawa were not needed.

Although critical of China's recent actions, which include assertive claims to much of the South China Sea and the declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone over Japanese-administered land, Kuznick said U.S. policy is encouraging Chinese nationalists to become more aggressive.

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South Koreans' view of Japanese prime minister dims

By ASHLEY ROWLAND
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is so unpopular in South Korea than even North Korean leader Kim Jong Un rated better in a recent poll.

Abe's Dec. 26 visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honors Japan's war dead, has plunged bilateral relations to a low point. A survey by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, conducted the week after Abe's visit, found that only 1.2 percent of respondents held a favorable opinion of the prime minister, compared with 1.9 percent for Kim.

Meanwhile, an overwhelming majority of South Koreans — 86.9 percent — now view Korea-Japan relations as "bad," with little difference in opinion because of age or political ideology, according to another Asan poll conducted Dec. 29-31. More than half of the 1,000

respondents expect relations to deteriorate further.

The dispute between two key U.S. allies was reportedly a topic of discussion during a meeting between South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry earlier this week in Washington.

To the disappointment of many South Koreans, Kerry did not address the Yasukuni visit during a news conference after the meeting, though Yun said the two "recognized the growing uncertainty pervading Northeast Asia in recent times."

"In particular, I pointed out that historical issues stand in the way of reconciliation and cooperation in this region, and I emphasized the need for sincere actions," Yun said in an apparent reference to Tokyo.

Japan's brutal colonization of the Korean peninsula and occupation of China before and during

World War II remain sore points with its neighbors, who believe Tokyo has not fully acknowledged its wrongdoings. Tokyo's possible expansion of the role of its defense-only forces has raised eyebrows in South Korea, where some believe Japan is returning to its militaristic past and could someday pose a threat to the region.

Forty-two percent of respondents said the Seoul-Tokyo dispute

over ownership of the Dokdo islets, called Takeshima in Japan, is the most important issue hurting the relationship, according to Asan. Thirty-three percent cited Japan's "distortion" of history, followed by the forced sexual slavery of Korean women during the Japanese occupation at 13.8 percent.

The survey also showed somewhat disparate attitudes toward Beijing, with nearly two-thirds

believing security cooperation with Japan would be necessary if China continues its rise. However, 74.5 percent said Seoul should cooperate with China to resolve historical grievances with Tokyo.

The survey also found that support for a Japan-South Korea summit had dropped by 8.6 percentage points since September to 49.5 percent.

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EUROPE

Cause of AF helicopter crash not determined

By ADAM L. MATHIS
Stars and Stripes

RAF LAKENHEATH, England — Two days after a U.S. Air Force helicopter crashed and killed its four crewmembers, officials are unable to say what caused the HH-60G Pave Hawk to go down near the town of Salthouse, England.

"It's still too early to speculate as to what caused the crash and make any long-term decisions based on that," said Col. Kyle W. Robinson, 48th Fighter Wing commander, speaking Thursday to reporters just outside one of RAF Lakenheath's gates.

Four airmen from the 56th Rescue Squadron were killed Tuesday when the helicopter crashed on a training mission.

Robinson said it was also too soon to decide whether any flight operations should be halted. He

said the 56th, which now has four Pave Hawks, is not scheduled to fly for the rest of the week. The 48th was to resume flying Thursday after having suspended flight Wednesday out of respect.

A Norfolk, England, police spokeswoman said in a phone interview Thursday that the bodies of the airman — Capt. Christopher S. Stover, Capt. Sean M. Ruane, Tech. Sgt. Dale E. Mathews and Staff Sgt. Afton M. Ponce — have been moved from the crash site and that the investigation has been handed over to the Air Force.

There was some concern that moving the bodies Wednesday would have interfered with the analysis of the crash site.

"The scene is on difficult ground, and the longer-term investigation and recovery work will take many more weeks," Chief Police Superintendent Bob

Scully said in a news release.

Robinson did not have exact numbers on the airmen's length of service, but he said the crew had been in the Air Force "from a couple of years" to more than 16 or 17 years.

"There is a range of experience levels and, in general ... some of the more experienced people will fly with the less experienced people, and this crew is no different," Robinson said. "They're all highly qualified in what they did and capable."

There was talk in Salthouse on Wednesday that something didn't sound right when the helicopters flew over before the crash. However, Robinson said he was not aware of the base receiving communications from the helicopter indicating anything was wrong before the crash.

Some concern also has been expressed about low-flying training

missions such as the one the helicopter was on when it crashed. A local government official was reported in The Guardian newspaper as saying that flying so close to a bird breeding ground was an "accident waiting to happen."

"Obviously we take great care to make sure we operate in the safest fashion, and all of the rules and missions that they follow are the standard ones followed by" the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence, Robinson said.

The crash scattered ammunition over a wide area, and local police have asked the public to respect a cordon while the ammunition is retrieved. Robinson said the helicopter was carrying 600 rounds of .50-caliber bullets and 15 rounds of 9 mm bullets for use at a nearby range.

Stover is survived by his wife, Sarah, and parents. The Columbian newspaper in Washington

state quoted Stover's father as saying that his son died "doing what he truly enjoyed, flying."

Ruane's mother, Marcia Ruane, told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette that her son was "a good kid, a good son and a wonderful brother." Ruane is survived by his wife, Rachel, and his son, Liam.

NBC affiliate WNDU in Indiana reported that Mathews was due to retire from the Air Force in a few months. He is survived by his wife, two children and two stepchildren.

"We feel cheated," Larry Gussman, Mathews' stepfather, told WNDU. "And I say that because Dale was in Desert Storm, he was in Iraqi Freedom and he got through all of that, and then to die in a stupid silly training exercise. We just feel cheated."

More information on Ponce was not available.

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US Navy health study consulted in Italian toxic dumping probe

By STEVEN BEARDSLEY
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Prosecutors here are consulting a U.S. Navy health study as part of an investigation into allegations of toxic waste dumping across the Naples region by mob-linked companies, Italian media reported Wednesday.

For decades, the organized crime syndicate Camorra has been dumping toxic waste on a swath of land just north of Naples. Environmental investigators have discovered thousands of dumping sites in recent years, and a 2004 British study pointed to higher cancer rates in one area, dubbed the "Triangle of Death."

The Navy study, conducted in the Naples region and at two U.S. bases between 2008 and 2009, looked at the health risks to Navy personnel living on the base and in the surrounding area. It concluded that contaminated wells were one

of the biggest health risks.

Local interest in the U.S. study has risen in recent months after new dumping claims by a former mob boss who was once active in the area. The Italian newspaper L'Espresso published an article in November suggesting that results from Navy testing confirmed the mobster's claims of dumping toxic and radioactive waste in certain areas across the region.

According to Wednesday's media reports, the anti-mafia task force is reviewing the U.S. study alongside local water testing from 2009 to 2013 and materials from the regional government.

A spokesman for the Navy base said the command has had no interaction with Naples prosecutors and that the health study has long been available on a public website.

After the L'Espresso article, titled "Drink Naples and Die," base commander Capt. Scott Gray held

a town hall meeting with Navy personnel in an effort to assuage growing concerns. He later met with the Caserta provincial president and the Naples mayor to discuss the study.

The Navy launched its study in 2007 after a prolonged garbage pileup in the city resulted in widespread fires at trash dumps, sparking fears of toxic fumes in the air.

Inspectors sampled tap water,

well water and soil at 543 off-base homes across the Naples area, as well as both bases — Capodichino, the headquarters of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa, and the Support Site at Grigignano, where families live on base. They tested air quality at several areas and looked at health indicators among the U.S. population, such as birth defects, cancer rates and asthma severity.

They concluded that on-base

personnel were in no particular danger based on the length of the average tour at the base. Yet base officials created several restriction zones for American leases, largely due to contaminated wells, one of the biggest risks found in the study. Officials also required off-base tenants to receive bottled water in every lease.

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Italy charges US soldier with sexually assaulting girl, 17

Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — A soldier with the 173rd Infantry Combat Brigade Team (Airborne) has been charged by Italian authorities with sexually assaulting a teenage girl, officials confirmed.

"We were aware of the charges," said Maj. Mike Weisman, a spokesman for the brigade. "We are participating fully with Italian authorities."

The soldier accused of the crime, whose name was not released, was not in Italian custody and had been returned to duty status, Weisman said.

The local Italian newspaper, Vicenza Giornale, reported Dec. 30 that the Vicenza prosecutor was investigating the soldier, 21, on

charges of kidnapping and sexual assault. According to the newspaper, the alleged crimes occurred in November.

The newspaper said the girl had been out at a local disco near Caserme Ederle, headquarters of U.S. Army Garrison Vicenza, before, she said, she was accosted and assaulted in a secluded area.

According to reports, the girl, 17, is a third-country national, Weisman said. He declined to specify her nationality.

It was unclear what would happen with the case. The U.S. military usually requests jurisdiction in criminal cases involving servicemembers even when alleged crimes occur off-post. It is not always granted, however.

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MILITARY

Amid prisoner dispute, Karzai orders release

By AMIR SHAH
The Associated Press

KABUL — Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Thursday ordered the release of all but 16 prisoners from a group of 88 detainees that the U.S. says pose a threat to the country and region.

In a statement, Karzai said that a review of the prisoners' cases by Afghan intelligence and judicial officials turned up no evidence of wrongdoing for 45 of the detainees. Karzai said there was insufficient evidence on another 27 and that they must be released. The statement gave no details on when the release will take place.

The remaining 16 detainees will remain in custody until their cases can be reviewed further, the statement said.

The prisoners' possible release has been a sticking point in Afghan-U.S. relations. Last week, a group of U.S. senators met Karzai in Kabul to warn him that release of the 88 detainees from the Parwan Detention Facility "would be a major step backwards" for U.S.-Afghan relations.

An Afghan panel last week ordered the release of 650 detainees from the Parwan Detention Facility. The U.S. says that there is "ample evidence" to suspect 88 of those detainees in the slay-

ing or wounding of 60 coalition forces and 57 Afghan forces. The U.S. wants those 88 to face trial in Afghanistan.

The U.S. turned over control of the Parwan facility, near the U.S.-run Bagram military base north of Kabul, to Afghan authorities last March.

Meanwhile, suicide bombers attacked a police station in Helmand province, killing one police officer and wounding three, a provincial spokesman said.

The attack Thursday evening also wounded six civilians, provincial government spokesman Omar Zawak said. Zawak said two suicide bombers detonated their explosives and police shot dead two other attackers before they could set off their bombs.

The attack took place in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital of Helmand, a Taliban stronghold.

Lashkar Gah is also where earlier Thursday the father of an Afghan girl who police say was part of a botched suicide bomb attack said he's afraid the Taliban will kill him and his daughter if they return to their village in southern Afghanistan.

Ex-Guantanamo detainee suspected in Benghazi raid

By ADAM GOLDMAN
The Washington Post

U.S. officials suspect a former Guantanamo Bay detainee played a role in the attack on the American compound in Benghazi, Libya, and are planning to designate the group he leads as a foreign terrorism organization, according to officials familiar with the plans.

Militiamen under the command of Abu Sufian bin Qumu, the leader of Ansar al-Sharia in the Libyan city of Darnah, participated in the attack that killed U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans, U.S. officials said.

Witnesses have told American officials that Qumu's men were in Benghazi before the attack took place on Sept. 11, 2011, according to the officials. It's unclear if they were there as part of a pre-planned attack or out of happenstance. The drive from Darnah to Benghazi takes several hours.

The State Department is expected to tie Qumu's group to the Benghazi attack when it des-

ignates three branches of Ansar al-Sharia in Darnah, Tunisia and Benghazi as foreign terrorism organizations in the coming days.

Qumu and two other individuals, including militia leaders Ahmed Abu Khattala and Seif Allah bin Hassine, also will be identified as "specially designated global terrorists," a determination that allows U.S. officials to freeze their financial assets and to bar American citizens and companies from doing business with them.

The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the developments.

About a dozen criminal complaints have been filed in the Benghazi case, with more expected. U.S. intelligence officials have said several militias had a hand in the Benghazi attack. Some of those individuals charged so far are from Darnah, although it's not clear if they are tied to Qumu's group. Khattala has already been named in a criminal complaint.



Courtesy of the Department of Defense

Army Spc. Brent Hendrix stretches with the help of physical therapy technician Staff Sgt. Sara Sutton at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington in 2008.

Units: Closings come as casualties decline

FROM FRONT PAGE

"Fortunately, the population of wounded, ill and injured soldiers across the Army has steadily declined over the last 14 months," Brig. Gen. David Bishop, commander of Army Warrior Transition Command, said Thursday at the Pentagon, according to prepared remarks. "There are 7,070 soldiers assigned to Warrior Transition Units and Community Based Warrior Transition Units as of Jan. 2, down from a high of 12,551 in June 2008."

The units to be inactivated are at Fort Irwin, Calif.; Fort Huachuca, Ariz.; Fort Jackson, S.C.; Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J.; and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.

The units slated to disappear are ones that have shrunk significantly as the character of the war in Afghanistan has changed. The largest of the units had 36 troops as of last week, and most had fewer than 10, all of whom will be moved to other units, Bishop said.

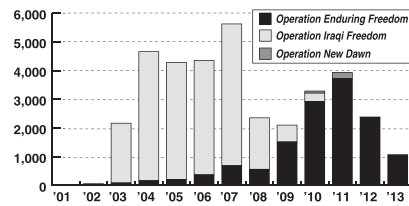
"Soldiers and their families assigned to these WTUs will undergo a deliberate transition process," Bishop said. "They will remain at the center of our focus and will continue to receive care and transition assistance." Guard and reserve soldiers transitioning into the new Community Care Centers will remain in their homes and will continue to receive care through the Tri-care network, Army officials said. Unlike the current CBWTUs, the new units will all be on Army bases alongside existing Wounded Warrior Battalions.

Bishop said bringing WTUs and CBWTUs closer together would simplify administration and would allow the units to take advantage of base command structures and installation support systems. The Army is aiming for the new structure to be as transparent as possible to soldiers, who will "as much as possible, have the same experience," he said.

The changes come at a time of dramatically falling numbers of dead and wounded following the end of the war in Iraq and the drawdown of troops in Afghanistan. There, Afghan troops are increasingly taking the lead in combat operations in preparation

Fewer wounded coming home

With the Iraq War long since concluded, and the number of U.S. wounded in Afghanistan dropping, the Army announced the realignment of its Warrior Transition Units. A look at statistics on wounded soldiers:



SOURCE: Defense Casualty Analysis System

Stars and Stripes

for the official end of Operation Enduring Freedom on Dec. 31.

In 2013, the Defense Casualty Analysis System reported 1,074 Army troops wounded in action, down from 2,380 in 2012 and 3,930 in 2011, the last year of the Iraq War. In the Army's worst year from the recent conflicts, 5,627 soldiers were wounded in action and 724 were killed as fighting raged in Iraq in 2007.

That year, following a scandal over poor conditions for wounded veterans at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, the Army established Warrior Transition Units in an effort to improve care for soldiers who need long-term recuperation.

Then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates fired Army Secretary Francis J. Harvey in March 2007 as a result of the Walter Reed scandal, while the Army replaced Lt. Gen. Kevin C. Kiley — a former commander at the medical center who stepped in after the scandal broke — just a day after he was named temporary commander.

While WTUs are structured similarly to traditional Army units, soldiers assigned to them spend their time going to medical appointments, doing physical rehabilitation, meeting with behavioral health therapists, playing sports, and other activities designed solely to aid in recovery.

The units themselves have not been without controversy, with news accounts highlighting prob-

lems such as overmedication, disrespectful treatment by NCOs, depression and idleness. The Army has fought such characterizations, citing a survey at the Fort Carson Warrior Transition Unit — singled out in a New York Times article — that indicated 90 percent of the troops there were satisfied with the level of care.

Thursday's announcement is not the first time the Army has trimmed Warrior Transition Units. In 2009, when the number of troops in the units had fallen from more than 12,000 to 9,500, the Army cut three WTUs at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., Fort Rucker and Redstone Arsenal, Ala., and restructured six others.

Currently, the Army reported, 9 percent of troops in the units are there because of combat wounds. Another 40 percent have deployment-related illnesses or injuries, while 4 percent have PTSD as a primary diagnosis. The others are nursing a variety of injuries and illnesses not directly related to the war, but the Army pointed out that 84 percent of troops in the WTUs have deployed during their careers.

Overall, more than 58,000 troops have passed through WTUs since they were created, and more than 28,000 have returned to the force, the Army said.

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MILITARY

Franklin will lose a star upon retirement

By NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

Third Air Force commander Lt. Gen. Craig Franklin will lose a star when he retires at the end of the month.

Franklin, whose decision last year to dismiss a sexual assault conviction led Congress to curb commander authority in the military justice system, and who announced his upcoming retirement on Wednesday, will be retired as a major general, officials said.

That's because Franklin will have served only 22 months as a lieutenant general when he retires effective Feb. 1. The law requires three years of time-in-grade for military officers' retirement purposes.

Franklin said in a statement that he was retiring "for the good of this command and the Air Force."



Franklin

His statement said that for nearly a year his judgment as a court-martial convening authority had been questioned publicly and

repeatedly.

"The last thing I want in this command, is for people to feel they cannot bring a sexual assault case forward or feel it won't be dealt with fairly," his statement said. "In addition, public scrutiny will likely occur on every subsequent case I deal with."

Three weeks ago, Stars and Stripes reported that top Air Force officials had moved for a sexual assault case to be reinvesti-

gated after Franklin, in concert with his legal adviser, had decided against a court-martial.

For nearly a year, Franklin has been a lightning rod in the debate over military sexual assault and how best to address it. In February, he dismissed a court-martial jury's sexual assault conviction of then-Lt. Col. James Wilkerson, sprung the Aviano, Italy-based fighter pilot from jail and reinstated him into the Air Force.

The law governing general officer retirements — Title 10 U.S.C.,

Section 1370(a)(2)(A) — does allow for exceptions for the time-in-grade requirements.

"The Secretary of Defense may waive the three-year time-in-grade requirement in instances where the general officer concerned has at least two years time-in-grade," according to the Senior Leaders Handbook for General Officers.

Additionally, the president may waive the requirement for general officers with less than two years of time-in-grade in "indi-

vidual cases involving extreme hardship or exceptional or unusual circumstances cases," the handbook says.

Franklin will not request a waiver, said Lt. Col. Paul Baldwin, a spokesman for U.S. Air Forces in Europe.

Franklin's retirement as a major general must be approved by the Air Force secretary, according to Lt. Col. Laurel Tingley, an Air Force spokeswoman.

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Off Duty? Amuse Yourself!

Despite cuts, brass will keep pensions

By TOM VANDEN BROOK
USA Today

WASHINGTON — Top military brass will keep their specially boosted pensions despite the December budget deal that trimmed pension rates for other military retirees, Pentagon officials said Tuesday.

In 2007, Congress passed a Pentagon-sponsored proposal that boosted retirement benefits for three- and four-star admirals and generals, allowing them to make more in retirement than they did on active duty. The Pentagon had requested the change in 2003 to help retain senior officers as the military was fighting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and wanted to entice officers to remain on active duty.

That means a four-star officer retiring with 40 years of experience would receive a pension of \$237,144, according to the Pentagon.

Base pay for active-duty top officers is \$181,501, according to Navy Lt. Cmdr. Nate Christensen, a Pentagon spokesman. Housing and other allowances can boost their compensation an additional third.

Last month's budget deal reduces cost-of-living adjustments, COLAs, by 1 percentage point a year until retirees reach age 62. At 62, the full COLA will return and pensions will bounce back to their full value.

The plan is estimated to save \$6 billion.

Currently, after 20 years of service, regardless of age, a military retiree qualifies for a pension amounting to 50 percent of final pay with an additional 2.5 percentage points for each year of service beyond 20.

The deal does not affect the 2007 enhancement for top pension, which has allowed pension rates for these officers to spike. Figures for 2011 show that a four-star officer retiring with 38 years of experience received a yearly pension of about \$219,600, a jump of \$84,000, or 63 percent beyond what was previously allowed.

A three-star officer with 35 years of experience would get about \$169,200 a year, up about \$39,000, or 30 percent.

Before the law was changed, the typical pension for a retired four-star officer was \$134,400.

A few officers top 40 years of service in part because the years spent at military academies is counted toward their pension.

In 2011, the Pentagon noted that the highest pension, \$272,892, was paid to a retired four-star officer with 43 years of service.

Since 2011, however, Pentagon officials have acknowledged that the military is top-heavy with brass and senior officials.

Then-Defense secretary Robert Gates announced a plan to eliminate positions for 102 generals and admirals.

Since then, 70 have been cut, others will leave when their combat assignments end and some jobs have been reassigned to lower ranks, according to the Pentagon.

Reasons for keeping pensions high for top brass is diminishing, said Loren Thompson, a military analyst at the Lexington Institute and a defense industry consultant.

"Elevating pension benefits to retain generals in wartime might make sense, but the next time we go to war most of the senior officers in the force today will be retired," Thompson said.



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NATION

Obama may limit NSA phone records access

By JULIE PACE
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama is expected to rein in spying on foreign leaders and is considering restricting National Security Agency access to Americans' phone records, according to people familiar with a White House review of the government's surveillance programs.

Obama could unveil his decisions as early as next week. On Thursday, the president will discuss his review with congressional lawmakers, while his top lawyer plans to meet with privacy groups. Representatives from tech companies are meeting with White House staff Friday.

The White House said Obama is still collecting information before making final decisions.

Among the changes Obama is expected to announce is more oversight of the National Intelligence Priorities Framework, a classified document that ranks U.S. intelligence-gathering priorities and is used to make decisions on scrutiny of foreign leaders. A presidential review board has recommended increasing the number of policy officials who help establish those priorities, and that could result in limits on surveillance of allies.

Documents released by former NSA systems analyst Edward Snowden revealed that the U.S. was monitoring the communica-

tions of several friendly foreign leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The revelations outraged Merkel as well as other leaders, and U.S. officials say the disclosures have damaged Obama's relations around the world.

Obama and Merkel spoke by phone Wednesday, but U.S. officials would not say whether they discussed the NSA issues.

The president also is said to be considering one of the review board's most aggressive recommendations — a proposal to strip the NSA of its ability to store telephone records from millions of Americans and instead have phone companies or a third party hold the records. The NSA would

be able to access the records only by obtaining separate court approval for each search, though exceptions could be made in the case of a national security emergency.

It's unclear whether Obama will ultimately back the proposal or how quickly it could be carried out if he does.

Before making his final decisions, the president was supposed to receive a separate report from a semi-independent commission known as the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, which was created by Congress.

However, that panel's report has been delayed without explanation until at least late January, meaning it won't reach the president until after he makes his de-

cisions public.

Members of that oversight board met with Obama on Wednesday and have briefed other administration officials on some of their preliminary findings.

In a statement, the five-member panel said its meeting with the president focused on the NSA phone collection program and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, which oversees the data sweeps.

It's unclear why Obama will announce his recommendations before receiving the report from the privacy and civil liberties board. One official familiar with the review process said some White House officials were puzzled by the board's delay.

Obama at odds with Congress over new Iran sanctions

By BRADLEY KLAPPER
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration enters the year locked in a battle with Congress over whether to play ahead with new economic sanctions against Iran or cautiously wait to see if last year's breakthrough nuclear agreement holds.

The new sanctions, widely endorsed by both Republican and Democratic lawmakers, would blacklist several Iranian industrial sectors and threaten banks and companies around the world with being banned from the U.S. market if they help Iran export any more oil. The provisions would take effect only if Tehran violates the interim nuclear deal or lets it expire without a follow-up accord.

The House already approved similar legislation last July by a 400-20 vote and would likely pass the new sanctions by an overwhelming margin. The Obama administration, fearful of squandering a historic diplomatic opportunity to end the nuclear crisis, has succeeded so far in holding off a Senate vote.

The standoff has prompted sharp criticism from both sides.

The Nov. 24 agreement "makes a nuclear Iran more likely," argued Republican Sen. Marco Rubio.

The deal "falls short of what is necessary for security and stability in the region," added Democratic Sen. Mary Landrieu.

White House press secretary Jay Carney has accused lawmakers of trying to spoil negotiations in Geneva as part of a "march to war."

All want to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. But the prevention strategies differ strikingly over the role additional sanctions might play as negotiators try to end the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran.



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

Secretary of State John Kerry testifies before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in the hope of persuading Congress not to forge any new economic sanctions on Iran.

Argument for new sanctions

Many Republicans and Democrats in Congress criticize the Geneva deal as unbalanced: some \$7 billion in sanctions relief to Iran for merely freezing, not dismantling, parts of its nuclear program.

With the ink barely dry, key lawmakers launched their sanctions push, backed by powerful pro-Israel lobbying groups. Sanctions proponents say they must act to prevent Iran from acquiring new nuclear "rights" through the agreement and permanently benefiting from eased economic conditions. With companies looking to invest in Iran again, they say the threat of future economic restrictions prevents the Iranian government from raking in new cash for nuclear-related activity.

Also, Iran's nuclear record is replete with deception. Its approach to negotiations is often compared with North Korea's before it became a nuclear power a decade ago. The sanctions bill would require the Obama administration to certify Iran's adherence to the nuclear deal every 30 days. Without that certification, the new sanctions start immediately — without the need for additional diplomatic talks or congressional hearings.

Argument against sanctions

The Obama administration says the point of negotiations was to pressure Iran into negotiating limits on its nuclear program. Now that Iran is doing that, U.S. officials say fresh sanctions are pointless and perhaps counterproductive as the world tests Iran. Congress, they warn, is providing ammunition to Iranian hard-liners who want to undermine President Hassan Rouhani's more moderate approach. Billions of dollars in U.S. sanctions remain in force already, and if Iran cheats or diplomacy fails, more sanctions could always come then.

As part of the interim deal, the U.S. promised Iran no new nuclear-related economic penalties for six months. A new round of sanctions, even though conditionally suspended, may stop short of breaking the agreement but could push Iran to quit negotiations — or issue its own threats of future action. Neither response serves U.S. national interests, administration officials say. America's international partners, who've invested years trying to resolve the crisis peacefully, could also blame Washington and question U.S. laws against investing in Iran.

Unemployment benefits extension debated in Senate

By PAUL KANE
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Wednesday haggled over competing proposals to extend unemployment benefits for the long-term jobless, with negotiators searching for a compromise that could extend the insurance program for a longer period than currently envisioned.

Republicans, who provided a key bloc of six votes to keep the legislation alive Tuesday, offered several proposals for offsetting budget cuts that would match the more than \$6.4 billion it would cost for a three-month extension of the benefits program. Democrats continued to oppose the alternative budget cuts to justify such a short extension, but they opened the door to finding cuts if the extension was longer.

"Let's try to figure out a way to do it for a year," Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said late Wednesday. Reid cited "productive" discussions on the issue with Sen. Bob Portman, R-Ohio, one of the six Republicans who voted to advance the legislation.

Speaking after Reid, Portman laid out his own proposal that would bar people from receiving jobless benefits while also drawing federal disability payments for those who lose work owing to injury on the job. His plan would bring an estimated \$5.4 billion in savings, almost enough to match the short-term extension of unemployment benefits. "I'm hopeful we'll be able to make progress on this," Portman said.

Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., also one of the six Republicans, offered another proposal meant to rein in fraud among illegal immigrants taking advantage of federal tax credits.

In late December, a federal law expired that allowed for emergency extensions of unemployment benefits beyond the usual 26 weeks. That shifted 1.3 million unemployed off the insurance program, and many more will run up against the normal limits and lose benefits throughout the year.

NATION

DA: Coaching given in false claims scam

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — When dozens of former police officers and firefighters sought disability benefits, advisers provided a playbook for faking mental illness — how to describe daily routines of languishing dysfunction, flunk simple concentration tests convincingly, dress down for benefits interviews, even how to link their supposed symptoms to 9/11, prosecutors say.

The decadeslong scam netted more than \$20 million in Social Security disability payments for

more than 100 people and tens of thousands of dollars in kickbacks for the benefits experts who helped them, the Manhattan district attorney's office said this week in unveiling a case that points up the complicated role consultants play in a system that helps sustain more than 10 million people nationwide.

Experts say advisers can give people valuable help in understanding what's needed, compiling information and navigating bureaucratic complexities. But they acknowledge the boundary

between explaining and gaming the system can be tricky, and sometimes crossed.

"A lot of times, a person really does need a lawyer or someone to guide them through the system. But once you have that, they have a financial interest in the case succeeding," said Dr. David Reiss, a San Diego, Calif., psychiatrist who has evaluated first responders and other applicants for disability, workers' compensation and other benefits. At times, he thinks consultants' conduct begs a question: "Where's the line between helping

someone to express what's going on emotionally, and where is it planting seeds?"

In the New York case, benefits advisers Joseph Esposito, Thomas Hale and John Minerva and lawyer Raymond Lavallee are accused of supplying a veritable forest of fibs.

Many applicants had physical injuries that qualified them for police or firefighter disability pensions, but not for federal disability benefits that require being unable to work at any job for at least a year, District Attorney Cyrus R.

Vance Jr. said.

Esposito, a retired officer who'd gotten the benefits himself, told applicants to claim psychiatric problems stemming from their work, often specifically from their response to the Sept. 11 attacks, according to prosecutors.

And, they said, he detailed how to do it.

"They're liable to say ... 'Spell the word "world," so you go, "W-R-L-D,"' Esposito told one applicant preparing to meet with benefits officials, according to prosecutors' court papers.



MEL EVANS/AP

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, seen sitting with students at Colin Powell Elementary School in Union City, N.J., on Tuesday, faces a big political test over revelations that members of his administration may have closed highway lanes to exact political retribution.

Christie fires key aide linked to lane-closing controversy

BY ANGELA DELLI SANTI
AND GEOFF MULVHILL

The Associated Press

TRENTON, N.J. — Gov. Chris Christie on Thursday apologized to his constituents and said he was "embarrassed and humiliated" by his staff, one day after emails and text messages revealed his administration may have closed highway lanes to exact political retribution.

Christie also said he was firing Deputy Chief of Staff Bridget Anne Kelly, "because she lied to me." Kelly is the latest casualty in a widening scandal that threatens to upend Christie's second term and likely run for president in 2016. Documents show she arranged traffic jams to punish the mayor, who didn't endorse Christie for re-election.

The revelations thrust a regional issue into a national conversation raising new questions about the ambitious governor's leadership on the eve of a second term designed to jumpstart his road to the White House.

The messages do not directly implicate Christie, but they contradicted his assertions that the

Email exchange

"Time for some traffic problems in Fort Lee."

Email from Bridget Anne Kelly, a deputy chief of staff in the governor's office, to Port Authority officials.

"Got it."

Response from David Wildstein, a political intimate of the governor's.

From The Washington Post

closings were not punitive and that his staff was not involved.

Christie acknowledged Thursday that was a lie, because his staff didn't tell him what they had done.

The messages were obtained by news organizations amid a state-house investigation into whether the lane closings that led to the tie-ups were retribution against the mayor of Fort Lee for not endorsing Christie for re-election last fall.

"Time for some traffic problems in Fort Lee," Kelly wrote

in August in a message to David Wildstein, a top Christie appointee on the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. A few weeks later, Wildstein closed two of three lanes connecting Fort Lee to the heavily-traveled George Washington Bridge, which goes into New York City.

Beyond the specifics of the lane closures, critics suggest the incident reflects a darker side of Christie's brand of politics that contradicts the image he'd like to project as he eyes the presidency.

The governor repeatedly side-stepped criticism that he bullied adversaries in an overwhelming re-election victory in November. Facing a little-known and underfunded opponent, he cast himself as a different kind of Republican: a compromising, consensus builder who ultimately earned strong support from minorities, union members and even many Democrats.

It was described as the opening argument for Christie's prospective White House run. That argument is now clouded, at least temporarily, during one of the most important transitions of his political career.

Giffords skydives on shooting anniversary

The Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. — Three years after being shot in the head at a political gathering, Gabrielle Giffords is still learning how to walk and talk again. That didn't stop her from jumping out of a plane in a tandem skydive to commemorate the attack and how far she's come.

Across the city of Tucson on Wednesday, others gathered for bell-ringing and flag-raising ceremonies to remember the six killed and 13 injured, including Giffords, on Jan. 8, 2011, as the former Arizona congresswoman met with constituents outside a grocery store.

Giffords waved and blew kisses to a crowd at a skydiving site south of Phoenix after successfully landing without injury.

"Gabby" landed beautifully. Happy she's safe. So proud of her bravery," Giffords' husband, former astronaut Mark Kelly, wrote on his Twitter account after the tandem jump with his wife strapped to a professional skydiver.

"She was the least nervous person on the plane," said Jimmy Hatch, a former Navy SEAL who accompanied Giffords along with others. "They did a little moment

of silence at the drop zone ... The emotion was really heavy. Then she smiled and said, 'Let's go.'"

Vice President Joe Biden's office said he called Giffords on Wednesday to wish her good luck.

"Gabby's courage & determination has been absolutely inspirational,"

Biden wrote on his office's Twitter account.

Giffords' jump was to be broadcast Thursday on NBC's "Today" show.

In Tucson, about 100 residents attended a ceremony outside the University of Arizona Medical Center, where the injured were treated. A bell was rung once for each victim as the Rev. Joe Fitzgerald spoke to the crowd.

"Today, we gather to remember the tragic day three years ago when our community was deeply wounded," he said.

Other ceremonies and moments of silence took place across the city.



Giffords

Trial set in vehicle deaths

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — The man accused of using his car to kill an African honeymooner and injure 17 people on the Venice Boardwalk in August will stand trial for murder and other charges, a judge ruled Wednesday.

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Antonio Barreto Jr. found there was sufficient evidence for Nathan Louis Campbell, 38, a Colorado native, to stand trial on one count of murder with a deadly and dangerous weapon in the death of Alice Gruppioni, 32, who was honeymooning with her husband at the time she was fatally struck.

Campbell also faces 17 counts

of assault with a deadly weapon, including three with great bodily injury, and 10 counts of hit-and-run. Prosecutors had previously listed the number of people injured in the alleged attack as 16.

Campbell turned himself in to Santa Monica police an hour after the Aug. 3 incident.

Witness testimony bolstered surveillance video footage that shows Campbell's 2008 Dodge Avenger ramming past a barrier post onto the beachfront pedestrian walkway before striking people as it careened for at least half a mile. Witnesses testified the car appeared to deliberately strike people while zigging and zagging down the boardwalk.

NATION



AL HARTMANN, THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE/AP

Julia Navarro, 58, left, is due to give birth to her granddaughter in February. Navarro offered to be a surrogate to her daughter, Lorena McKinnon, right, of Provo, Utah, who has a history of miscarriages.

US mom, 58, to give birth to her daughter's daughter

The Associated Press

PROVO, Utah — A 58-year-old U.S. woman is set to give birth in a few weeks — to her first grandchild.

Julia Navarro is serving as a gestational surrogate for her daughter and son-in-law after the couple struggled with fertility problems.

Navarro's daughter, Lorena McKinnon, said she began trying to have a baby with her husband, Micah McKinnon, three years ago.

The 32-year-old, from Provo, Utah, said she's had about a dozen miscarriages, with the longest pregnancy lasting 10 weeks.

After several tries, the couple began looking for a surrogate. McKinnon said a friend and sister both considered carrying her baby, but ultimately decided against it.

That's when her mother offered to step in.

"As a family, we have to help each other," Navarro told The

Salt Lake Tribune.

Navarro had to undergo hormone shots for three months before an embryo fertilized by her daughter and son-in-law could be implanted. Because of her age, doctors had warned there was only a 45 percent chance the implantation would be successful.

The procedure was a success, and Navarro said she's had a smooth pregnancy carrying a developing baby girl.

As with other surrogacy arrangements, the couple and Navarro needed three months of counseling.

"The psychologists wanted to make sure we knew what we were getting into — that we were mentally prepared," McKinnon said. "Mostly, surrogacy contracts are with people you don't know. It was weird to have a contract with my mom."

It's unclear how rare it is for a woman to carry her own grandchild, but recent news reports have detailed similar relationships.

Last year, a 53-year-old Iowa woman gave birth to her twin granddaughters. And in 2012, a 49-year-old woman in Maine gave birth to her grandson.

McKinnon said she was grateful and overwhelmed by her mother's offer, which eases some of the obstacles and financial burdens for parents using a gestational surrogate.

According to Utah law, surrogates must be 21 or older, financially stable and must have already given birth once.

Couples must be married and are allowed to offer a reasonable payment to a surrogate.

On average, a couple can spend about \$60,000 on procedures and paying the surrogate, but McKinnon said her mother's offer to help is saving the couple about half of that.

Both she and her daughter said they've bonded over the experience.

The baby girl is due in early February.

Vegas welcome sign now solar powered

The Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Officials in Las Vegas are harnessing the power of the sun to light the city's iconic welcome sign.

Elected officials and project leaders flipped a switch Wednesday linking solar panels on 25-foot towers to the glittering

neon "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas" sign.

The project was headed by the Green Chips and Clean Energy Project nonprofit organizations, and funded by the Consumer Electronics Association, electric utility NV Energy, the Las Vegas Centennial Commission and Bombard Renewable Energy.

The new power source is the latest upgrade for the sign designed by Betty Willis and installed in 1959 in a traffic median on the Las Vegas Strip.

A parking lot for private vehicles and tour buses was expanded in 2012 to make access to the sign safer for picture-takers.

NYC residents sue over WTC security

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — New Yorkers living around the rebuilt World Trade Center are fighting what they call the "fortresslike" security planned for their neighborhood. They say the \$40 million barrier would block them in.

Residents have sued the New York Police Department, the city and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which runs the trade center.

On Thursday in Manhattan

state Supreme Court, members of the World Trade Center Neighborhood Alliance were set to show that the NYPD went too far with plans for guard booths, gates, fencing and checkpoints.

Plaintiff Mary Perillo, a longtime resident, said the neighborhood has become far more residential since 9/11. She said the security plan isolates residents while the area is flooded by tourists.

The city Law Department has said the security is necessary.

Food, drink companies cut 6.4 trillion calories

By MARY CLARE JALONICK

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Some of the nation's largest food companies have cut calories in their products by more than 6.4 trillion, according to a new study.

The study sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that between 2007 and 2012 the companies reduced their products' calories by the equivalent of around 78 calories per person per day. The total is more than four times the amount those companies had pledged to cut by next year.

Seventy-eight calories would be about the same as an average cookie or a medium apple, and the federal government estimates an average daily diet at around 2,000 calories. The study said the calories cut averaged out to 78 calories per day for the entire U.S. population.

The 2010 pledge taken by 16 companies — including General Mills Inc., Campbell Soup Co., ConAgra Foods Inc., Kraft Foods Inc., Kellogg Co., Coca-Cola Co., PepsiCo Inc. and Hershey Co. — was to cut 1 trillion calories by 2012 and 1.5 trillion calories by 2015.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation signed on to hold the companies accountable, and that group hired researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to painstakingly count the calories in almost every single packaged item in the grocery store. To do that, the UNC researchers used the store-based scanner data of hundreds of thousands of foods, commercial databases and nutrition facts panels to calculate exactly how many calories the companies were selling.

The researchers aren't yet releasing the entire study, but they said Thursday that the companies have exceeded their own goals by a wide margin.

Dr. James Marks, director of the Health Group at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, said the group is pleased with the results, but the companies "must sustain that reduction, as they've pledged to do, and other food com-

panies should follow their lead."

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is a nonpartisan philanthropic and research organization that works to improve the nation's health.

Even though the companies that made the commitment represent most of the nation's most well-known food companies, they sold only around a third of all packaged foods and beverages at the beginning of the study. Missing are many off-label brands sold under the names of retailers, and

Between 2007 and 2012, food companies have reduced their products' calories by the equivalent of around 78 calories per person per day.

it's unclear whether those products have changed. It is also unclear how the reduction in calories translates into consumers' diets. When the com-

panies made the pledge in 2010, they said one way they would try to reduce calories would be to change portion sizes in an attempt to persuade consumers to eat less. The companies also said they would develop new lower-calorie options and change existing products so they have fewer calories.

Evidence of those efforts are visible on any grocery store shelf. Many products now come in lower calorie versions, are baked instead of fried, or are sold in miniature as well as larger versions.

Marks said he believes that companies' efforts to package smaller servings — 100-calorie packs of popular snacks, for example — and smaller cans of sugary drinks may have contributed to the reduction in calories. He said the main contributors most likely were the public's increasing willingness to buy healthier foods and companies responding to those consumers.

WORLD

Biden calls Iraqi leader for 2nd time this week

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Vice President Joe Biden spoke on Wednesday for a second time this week to Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, voicing support for the Baghdad government's effort to regain control of the city of Fallujah from al-Qaida-linked fighters.

The White House said Biden encouraged al-Maliki to continue talks with local, tribal and national leaders and said Biden welcomed

al-Maliki's affirmation Wednesday that Iraqi elections will occur as scheduled in April.

The White House said al-Maliki described a series of political initiatives in the embattled Anbar province. Biden endorsed a decision by Iraq's Council of Ministers to provide state benefits to tribal forces killed or injured fighting al-Qaida-linked fighters.

Biden also spoke to al-Maliki on Monday, voicing concern about those suffering from terrorism.

The battle for Fallujah looms large for U.S. troops.

The fighting there began in April 2004 after four security contractors from Blackwater USA were killed and the desecrated bodies of two were hung from a bridge. The so-called second battle of Fallujah occurred seven months later and, for several weeks, Marines went house to house in what has been called some of the heaviest urban combat involving the corps since the Battle of Hue City, Vietnam, in

1968. About 100 Americans died and another 1,000 were wounded during the major fighting there.

On Wednesday in San Antonio, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said Iraqi forces are handling the current situation in Fallujah. He said it was never the intent of the United States to stay and defend Iraq forever.

Hagel was asked whether U.S. forces were killed and wounded in Fallujah in vain.

"I don't agree with the analy-

sis that (U.S.) lives were wasted," Hagel said during a visit to Brooke Army Medical Center. "It's just not true."

On Tuesday, Secretary of State John Kerry spoke with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari.

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Kerry encouraged the Iraqi government to continue efforts to empower local officials and tribes to isolate the al-Qaida fighters and drive them out of populated areas.

Division over Iraq puts strain on Saudi-US ties

By GLEN CAREY
Bloomberg News

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Few goods transit the desert border between the Middle East's two biggest oil producers, and Saudi authorities have built a fence to help ensure that political instability in Iraq doesn't cross over, either.

Dysfunctional ties between the countries have come into focus as a wave of violence sweeps Iraq, turning it into another arena where Saudi interests are diverging from those of the United States. Fighting is centered in Anbar province, bordering Saudi Arabia, where Sunni fighters with ties to al-Qaida are rebelling against the Shiite-led government of Nouri al-Maliki, which is supported by Iran.

The Saudi view is that al-Maliki is "aggravating the feelings of marginalization that some Iraqi Sunnis have long complained about and that are at the root of the current violence," said Fahad Nazer, a political analyst at Vienna, Va.-based intelligence analyst JTG and a former analyst for the Saudi embassy in Washington.

By contrast, the U.S. has offered to help al-Maliki and so has Iran, Saudi Arabia's main regional rival. That shows how far the Saudi-American alliance has drifted since the early days of the Syrian civil war, when a similar sectarian divide saw the Saudis and the U.S. on one side and Iran on the other.

While there's no indication that the Sunni fighters in Anbar, led by the al-Qaida-linked Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or

ISIL, are getting Saudi support, the wider Sunni community in Iraq is looking to Riyadh for assistance. Tariq Hashemi, Iraq's Sunni former vice president, last month called on Saudi Arabia for help.

Iraq's Sunnis "face two main problems," he said in an interview with Al-Jazeera. "We lack a unifying project and a country that supports our cause."

Saudi-Iraq ties have been strained since the U.S. overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003 led three years later to the election of al-Maliki's government, the first led by Shiites to rule Iraq.

Saudi Arabia has no embassy in Baghdad, and there's little commercial contact. In 2012, Iraq traded more with Thailand than it did with the kingdom to its south, even though Saudi Arabia is the Arab world's largest economy, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. The border between the countries is closed except during the annual Hajj pilgrimage, according to Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Interior.

In November, Saudi authorities said six mortar shells landed in an uninhabited desert area of the kingdom near the Iraq border. An Iraqi Shiite group claimed responsibility.

"The Saudis had serious reservations about the U.S. invasion, fearing that Saddam's removal would create a power vacuum that would be filled by Iran," Nazer said. "In the eyes of many, those fears were not unwarranted."



Mohammed Layth Ahmed weeps over the coffin of his father, Layth Ahmed, an Iraqi soldier who was killed during clashes in Ramadi, Iraq.

Suicide bomber in Baghdad kills at least 21

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — A suicide bomber blew himself up at a military recruiting center in Baghdad on Thursday, killing at least 21 people in an attack likely meant to send a message to the government and would-be army volunteers over the Iraqi troops' ongoing push to retake two cities overrun by al-Qaida militants.

The blast struck as an international rights group warned of the apparent use of indiscriminate mortar fire in civilian areas by Iraqi forces in their campaign to reassert control over the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi.

Al-Qaida-linked fighters overran parts of both cities in Sunni-

dominated Anbar province last week, seizing control of police stations and military posts, freeing prisoners and setting up their own checkpoints.

Iraqi troops, backed by pro-government Sunni militiamen, have since been clashing with the fighters and carrying out airstrikes against their positions in an effort to reassert control of the cities.

Tribal leaders in Fallujah, 40 miles west of Baghdad, have warned al-Qaida fighters there to leave to avoid a military showdown.

The United States, whose troops fought bloody battles in Fallujah and Ramadi, has ruled out sending American troops back in but has been delivering missiles to

help bolster Iraqi forces, with more on the way.

Human Rights Watch said Thursday that Iraqi forces appear to have used mortar fire indiscriminately in civilian areas in recent days in their effort to dislodge militants in Anbar, and that some residential areas were targeted with mortar shells and gunfire even though there was no sign of an al-Qaida presence in those specific areas.

It also warned that a government blockade of Ramadi and Fallujah is limiting civilian access to food, water and fuel, and that "unlawful methods of fighting by all sides" has caused civilian casualties and major property damage.

NJ senator may drop opposition to selling, leasing US helicopters to Iraq

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A powerful Senate Democrat has signaled that he might allow the transfer of AH-64 Apache helicopters to Iraq as the government in Baghdad struggles to recapture key territory seized by Islamic extremists. The New York Times reported late Wednesday.

Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J.,

chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, has blocked the lease and sale of the powerful attack helicopters for months, the Times wrote. He is seeking assurances that Iraq would not use them to attack civilians and that the government in Baghdad would take steps to stop Iran from using Iraqi airspace to ship arms to Syria's military.

Menendez received a three-

page letter last week from Iraq Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki responding to his concerns and received an urgent call Tuesday from the State Department promising a further response, according to the report.

The Obama administration has proposed selling up to 30 of the helicopters to the Iraqis, but because building them could take years, it has also asked to lease up

to 10 aircraft in the interim, the Times noted.

Administration officials said the Apaches could be useful in targeting fighters affiliated with al-Qaida, such as those who have taken over parts of Fallujah and Ramadi. But even if Menendez dropped his objections, it could take until April to deliver them, and officials noted that pilots would still need to be trained.

The Times also wrote that the administration is planning to ship more Hellfire missiles as early as this spring, 10 ScanEagle surveillance drones in coming weeks and 48 Raven surveillance drones later in the year.

Those come on top of Aerostat surveillance balloons provided in September and three additional Bell TA-407 helicopters sent last month.

WORLD



PHOTOS BY BULLIT MARQUEZ/AP

Watching over Philippines celebration

Above: Police snipers keep watch as hundreds of thousands of Catholic Filipinos begin a raucous religious procession in Manila, Philippines, on Thursday to honor the feast day of the Black Nazarene, a centuries-old statue of Jesus Christ. **Right:** Devotees climb a carriage to touch and kiss the image of the Black Nazarene during the procession in an annual event that organizers say will be held partly to pray for the victims of a monster typhoon that devastated the central Philippines last year.



Danish cinnamon rolls too spicy for EU

By Jan M. Olsen
The Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Easy on the cinnamon! That advice from Denmark's food authority has rankled pastry chefs whose cinnamon rolls were found to violate the European Union's spice rules.

The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration recently discovered that Danish cinnamon rolls and twists contained more coumarin — a chemical compound in the most common variety of cinnamon — than EU rules allow. Excessive intake of coumarin can cause liver damage.

So the agency asked Danish bakers to reduce the amount of cinnamon they sprinkle into the dough for sweet treats like the "kanelnegle" (cinnamon roll) and "kanelstang" (cinnamon twist).

Danish bakers protested, saying the EU limit is too strict and would make it hard, if not impossible, to make their cherished pastries.

"A grown man like me could eat like 10 'kanelnegle' every day for several years and not even get near the limit of what's dangerous to my liver," said Anders Grabow, a spokesman for the Danish Bakers' Association. "I would probably get too much sugar in my body before that."

The EU limit for so-called "fine baked goods" is set at 15 milligrams of coumarin per kilogram of pastry. The Danish agency found last year that more than half of the 74 food samples it took from bakeries, supermarkets and importers contained more coumarin than that.

The Danish bakers noted that their colleagues in neighboring Sweden can get away with more than three times as much coumarin in their cinnamon rolls because food authorities there classify them as "traditional and seasonal bakery" for which EU rules are less strict.

The Danish food agency didn't use that classification because it didn't consider the "kanelnegle"

as a pastry sold primarily for Christmas or other holidays, said agency spokesman Henrik Nielsen.

Officials will meet with the bakers' association next month to review which baked goods can be considered seasonal or traditional, he said.

"When someone challenges people's craftsmanship, it may get emotional," Nielsen said. But, "We want the industry to respect existing rules."

EU spokesman Frederic Vincent said it's up to authorities in member countries to enforce EU legislation and that the bloc's commission in Brussels isn't about to ban any Scandinavian pastry. However, he said, the commission would be ready to help Swedish and Danish authorities upon request "to find a common interpretation that complies with the EU legislation, adequately protects Danish and Swedish (and other European consumers) and does not disrupt the EU internal market."

No deep freeze: Australia bakes amid heat wave

By Rod McGuirk
The Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia — Bats are dropping from trees, kangaroos are collapsing in the Outback and gardens are turning brown. While North America freezes under record polar temperatures, the southern hemisphere is experiencing the opposite extreme as heat records are being set in Australia after the hottest year ever.

Weather forecasters in Australia said some parts of the sparsely populated Pilbara region along the rugged northwest coast on Thursday were approaching 122 degrees Fahrenheit. The record high of 123.3 degrees was set in 1960 in Oodnadatta, South Australia state.

Outback resident Gian Tate, 60, spent much of the day soaking in a small wading pool at her home near Emu Creek in the Pilbara region, a remote area off the electric grid. The thermometer outside her home registered 122 degrees on Wednesday, she said. Tate and her husband rely on two electric fans to cope with the oven-like heat and rarely turn on the small air conditioner in their bedroom because of the high cost of fuel to run their generator.

"We've just got to live with it; there's nothing you can do," she said.

Brazil also is sizzling, with the heat index reaching 120 degrees. Zookeepers in Rio de Janeiro were giving animals ice pops to beat the heat.

The late arrival of the monsoon in northern Australia, which has a cooling effect, is contributing to the searing heat, said Karyl Braganza, the manager of climate monitoring at the Bureau of Me-

teorology. Global warming also is playing a role, he said.

So far, this year's heat wave, which started about Christmas and has moved counterclockwise across Australia's north, is not as extensive or prolonged as last year's. But it would likely continue and move toward South Australia state, Braganza predicted.

"Certainly looking at the forecast over the next week, it's looking like that heat is going to continue," he said.

Since Dec. 27, records have been set at 34 locations across Australia — some by large margins — where temperature data has been collected for at least 40 years mostly in Queensland and New South Wales states. In the mining town of Narrabri in New South Wales, the new record of 118 degrees exceeded the previous record by 6.5 degrees.

The extreme temperatures come on the heels of Australia's hottest year on record, beating the previous record year of 2005, with mean temperatures 2.2 degrees above the 1961-90 average.

The heat wave in Australia has taken a toll on wildlife, too.

In Winton, famous for being one of the hottest spots in Queensland and also the place where Australia's unofficial anthem, "Waltzing Matilda," was penned, a "large number" of parrots, kangaroos and emus have recently been found dead in the parched landscape, said Tom Upton, chief executive of Winton Shire Council.

At least 50,000 bats had been killed by the heat in the state's southeast, said Louise Saunders, president of the Queensland animal welfare group Bat Conservation and Rescue.

Russia: 6 men found dead in abandoned cars

MOSCOW — Russian investigators were trying Thursday to determine who killed six men whose bodies were found in four cars abandoned in an area of southern Russia close to the volatile Caucasus Mountains.

Three of the cars had been rigged with explosive devices, but only one of the bombs went off and no one was hurt. The victims had been shot, according to investigators.

The killings, discovered Wednesday on the outskirts of Pyatigorsk, further heightened security concerns ahead of the Winter Olympics in Sochi. Both cities lie near the Caucasus region, where an Islamic insurgency is simmering.

Vladimir Markin, spokesman

for Russia's main investigative agency, said in a statement that Federal Security Service officers had joined the investigation, and that no motive had been determined.

NTV television reported from the scene that security had been heightened on the nearby border with Kabardino-Balkaria, one of several predominantly Muslim republics in Russia's Caucasus.

Three men whose bodies were in three of the cars have been identified. Two were taxi drivers and the third assembled furniture for a private businessman, Russian state news agencies reported, citing law enforcement agencies. Their names have not been released.

The men were said to be local residents and drove inexpensive, Soviet-model Lada cars.

From The Associated Press

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FAITH

RUNNING FOR HIS LIFE

Army Chaplain Capt. Jeremiah Catlin shows where surgeons sliced through his pectoral muscle to remove his melanoma cancer tumors six years ago, at Fort Jackson, S.C. Catlin has since been declared cancer-free and has improved his physical condition to the degree that he is running marathons.

SUSANNE M. SCHAFER/AP



Army chaplain beats cancer, completes SC marathon

By SUSANNE M. SCHAFER
The Associated Press

WHILE deployed in Iraq in 2007, Army Chaplain Jeremiah Catlin discovered a lump growing on his chest. Evacuated to a military hospital, the 32-year-old was told he had Stage 4 melanoma cancer and that he should spend a last Christmas with his family since he had less than a year to live.

"I was crushed," Catlin recalled. "In my first talks with God, I was sure he'd made the wrong decision; I had so much more to offer."

That was six years ago.

Since then, Catlin endured three surgeries, months of chemotherapy and weeks of radiation. The treatment drained the once-active student who wrestled and played intramural soccer at Kansas State University. He said he was "devastated, very depressed" and nearly 40 pounds above his normal weight.

But Catlin said the experience also taught him he could still serve as a chaplain. One day in the hospital, a nurse persuaded an older military veteran to sit with him. Catlin said the veteran agreed to take his anti-cancer

drugs only if they sat together in the hours they got their intravenous medications.

"I realized God was still going to use me, even if I was hooked up to an IV," Catlin said.

Catlin, a Wichita, Kan., native who was trained in civilian life as a Baptist minister, said it began to dawn on him that cancer wasn't going to keep him from following his passion for counseling soldiers.

With his health improving, he was allowed to return to active duty in 2009. But he was placed on a regimen that sharply curtailed physical activity, meaning he could not be deployed overseas, run, or tote a backpack. His doctors feared strenuous activity would cause his blood vessels to burst.

"My greatest time of ministry was in Iraq," Catlin said. "During combat, ministry in-

creases. And I did not want to leave it."

So Catlin said he decided to get back in shape, pass the Army's physical fitness test and maybe even run a marathon at Darlington Raceway, about 70 miles east of Fort Jackson.

"I thought about the Darlington marathon because of the symbolism of me crossing that line," Catlin said.

Catlin said it took months to build up his strength.

"I couldn't run a quarter-mile without stopping. My shoulder was hurting where they had separated my pectoral muscle," Catlin said, showing where doctors sliced through his upper chest to remove many of his tumors.

Catlin said he worked on his running and fitness while at-

tending advanced classes for senior-level chaplains at the Army Chaplain Center and School at Fort Jackson.

In fall 2012, doctors declared him five years in remission and cancer-free.

To pass the Army's fitness test, Catlin had to run 2 miles and perform a series of pushups and situps in timed sequence for his age group.

Catlin's course instructor, Chaplain Martin Kendrick, said ministers at the school "all embraced him" once they learned his story.

"You can't help but be inspired by him, by his determination, his prayerfulness, his motivation," said Kendrick, a major. "You can tell that he knows that every day is a blessing."

Catlin said he thinks that his cancer may have been a gift from God.

"Every time I talk to someone with cancer, I think maybe God gave that to me so I can relate to them," Catlin said. "And if God can use me more by putting me through it, we'll praise the Lord for allowing me to have that experience."



Catlin crosses the finish line at the Darlington marathon.

Courtesy of Army Chaplain Paul Hur

FACES

Bullock sweeps People's Choice Awards

Hudson honored as humanitarian

By JESSICA HERNDON
The Associated Press

Sandra Bullock reigned supreme at the 40th annual People's Choice Awards on Wednesday night, taking home four trophies as the evening's top winner.

The actress was named favorite movie actress, comedic actress, dramatic actress and shared the favorite movie duo award with "Gravity" co-star George Clooney. Bullock's buddy comedy, "The Heat," co-starring Melissa McCarthy, was awarded favorite comedic movie.

Fans deemed Ellen DeGeneres their favorite daytime TV host, making her the woman who has gained the most People's Choice Awards with a total of 14 trophies.

"As a young girl growing up in New Orleans, if anyone would have told me I was going to win 14 People's Choice Awards I ... I mean 12, yes, 13, maybe. But 14?" joked DeGeneres, host of "The Ellen DeGeneres Show."

"Iron Man 3" scored three awards including favorite movie, action movie and the film's star, Robert Downey Jr., channeling Iron Man in his acceptance speech, received the favorite action movie star honor.

Justin Timberlake also nabbed three awards. Among them was the favorite album accolade for "The 20/20 Experience." In a sweet moment, he thanked his "beautiful wife," Jessica Biel, "for teaching me patience and the little things like just putting the dishes in the dishwasher. It goes a



CHRIS PIZZELLO, INVISION/AP

Jennifer Hudson, left, accepts the favorite humanitarian award as her sister Julia Hudson looks on at the 40th annual People's Choice Awards in Los Angeles on Wednesday.

long way. Fellas, you're welcome."

Katy Perry, who was not at the show, scored the win for favorite video for the third year in a row, following up last year's award for "Part of Me" and 2012's honor for "Last Friday Night" with her hit "Roar" this year.

After the debut of the talk show "The Queen Latifah Show" in 2013, fans crowned Queen Latifah their favorite new talk show host.

Ian Somerhalder and Nina Dobrev, the stars of "The Vampire Diaries," earned the award for best on-screen chemistry at the People's Choice Awards. The duo, who had their round of breakups and makeups on-screen and off, joked about their coupledom.

"The good thing is chemistry," said

Dobrev, with her arm around Somerhalder, who she is no long romantically attached to. They managed to make a would-be awkward moment entertaining by addressing their buzz-worthy pairing head-on.

Jennifer Hudson was the show's second humanitarian award recipient for her work with children via her Julian D. King Gift Foundation. Bullock gained the show's first humanitarian award in 2013.

Accompanied on stage by her sister Julia, Hudson, holding back tears, accepted the favorite humanitarian award. "My mother always taught us without family you have nothing," Hudson said. "Whether you know it or not, we all are family. What happens to the other happens to us. It's one thing to be a celebrity and have power, but it means nothing if we're not making a difference and helping someone else. It feels good to see positivity acknowledged. Where we come from all you hear about is who shot who and who went to jail. There is more to life than the block you live on. We want to show them that I came from the same area and if I can do it, you can do it too."

LL Cool J presented Hudson with the award.

For a complete list of nominees and winners: peoplechoice.com



Sandra Bullock holds her awards for favorite movie actress, dramatic movie actress and comedic movie actress.

John Shear et al.
Invision/AP



MANUEL BALCE CENETA/AP

No deal

Chris Brown was at District of Columbia Superior Court on Wednesday for a status hearing in a case. Lawyers for the singer told a judge Wednesday that Brown rejected a plea deal on a charge that he hit a man outside a Washington, D.C., hotel in October. Prosecutors had offered a deal in which Brown would plead guilty to the misdemeanor assault charge. One of Brown's lawyers, Danny Onorato, said outside of court that attorneys rejected the deal because Brown is not guilty. Brown's lawyers said in court that they expect a trial date to be set at another hearing, scheduled for Feb. 20.

The Associated Press

WWE is moving outside the ring to mesh the best of Hulk Hogan, The Rock and John Cena all in one place — its own network.

It's time to lay the smack down 24/7. The WWE Network launches Feb. 24 as a streaming service for \$9.99 per month with a six-month commitment and will include all 12 pay-per-view events.

The network is available on desktops and laptops via WWE.com. WWE Network will also be available through the WWE App on Amazon's Kindle Fire devices; Android devices such as Samsung Galaxy; iOS devices such as Apple iPad and iPhone; Roku streaming devices; PlayStation 3 and PlayStation 4; and Xbox 360.

"WWE Network will provide transformative growth for our company and unprecedented value for our fans," WWE Chairman and CEO Vince McMahon said Wednesday.

WWE joins the NFL, NHL, NBA and MLB as the latest sports-based organization that has its own around-the-clock network. The network will air original content, including pregame and postgame shows for its flagship "Raw" on Monday nights, classic events, reality shows, documentaries and other programming. The on-demand content is the main selling point for an older audience looking to reconnect with the product.

"We believe that is the future," WWE chief revenue and marketing officer Michelle Wilson said.

Fans can relive matches from the Attitude Era or simply catch up on today's franchise players like Daniel Bryan and C.M. Punk.

WWE said it planned to hold the price at \$9.99 even after the initial six-month commitment.

TV show to film in Australia

Typically one sign a TV series is doing well is if there's a budget to travel and film on location. By that definition, "Modern Family" is doing extremely well — the cast is heading across the globe.

Qantas Airlines says it is partnering with the show's production company, 20th Century Fox Television, to fly the cast to Australia next month for a two-week shoot of the ABC comedy.

"Modern Family," now in its fifth season, has aired previous vacation episodes that were filmed in Hawaii and Wyoming.

In a statement, show creator Steve Levitan says: "We promise to feature a kangaroo, a koala and a boomerang."

Guitarists leaving band

Warren Haynes and Derek Trucks are leaving the Allman Brothers Band at the end of the year. A statement released by the band's spokeswoman Wednesday said the guitarists are leaving the legendary rock band to spend more time with their families

and work on their other musical projects.

Haynes joined the group in 1989, and Trucks became a member in 1999.

"While I've shared many magical moments on stage with the Allman Brothers Band in the last decade plus, I feel that my solo project and the Tedeschi Trucks Band is where my future and creative energy lies," Trucks said. Trucks fronts his own Derek Trucks Band and is a member of the Tedeschi Trucks Band. Haynes has his own band, Gov't Mule.

Other news

■ "Saturday Night Live" is expanding its ethnic diversity off-screen as well as on. A network spokeswoman, Lauren Roseman, said Wednesday that NBC's comic institution is adding two black women — LaKendra Tookes and Leslie Jones — to its writing staff.

■ The Insane Clown Posse sued the U.S. Justice Department on Wednesday over a 2011 FBI report that describes the rap-metal duo's devoted fans, the Juggalos, as a dangerous gang, saying the designation has tarnished reputations and hurt business. The American Civil Liberties Union filed the lawsuit on behalf of the group's two members, Joseph Bruce, or Violent J, and Joseph Utsler, or Shaggy 2 Dope. It also names four fans as plaintiffs. The lawsuit contends that the gang designation violates free speech and due process rights.

WWE set to launch own 24/7 network in February

FACES

Gold RUSH

Awards season kicks off with annual Golden Globes

By ANDY GOLDBERG
dpa

The Oscars are aren't until March, but Hollywood is already in the grip of awards fever.

The Golden Globe Awards will be handed out Sunday (the show airs Monday on AFN-Prime and AFN-Movie).

Serious film types often dismiss the Globes as largely irrelevant to the inner workings of Hollywood, since the awards are chosen by a small and self-selected group of foreign film journalists, few of whom are credentialled to major media organizations.

But that hasn't stopped the awards show from becoming one of the best-known Hollywood events of the year. The event often attracts major stars, and can give winning movies a boost with audiences.

Since 1956, the Globes have been honoring the best of television as well as film, unlike the Academy Awards, which focus only on movies.

In the past, the Golden Globes have had a haphazard record at predicting Oscar success. That is unlikely to change this year. But with critics acclaiming this year's crop of movies one of the most award-worthy in recent memory, there is bound to be significant overlap. That augurs well for "12 Years a Slave" and "American Hustle," the two movies which came out on top of the nominations, earning seven nods apiece.

Unlike the Oscars, the Golden Globes split their choice in two — choosing separate pictures for best drama and best comedy or musical. That means that Steve McQueen's tale of a free black man kidnapped into slavery in pre-Civil War America is the favorite to win the award for best drama, while David O Russell's caper about an FBI corruption sting operation is just as sure to win

for best comedy or musical.

The odds are best reflected in a closely-watched poll of experts conducted by entertainment awards site GoldDerby.com. Of the 19 experts it asked, 18 predicted victory for "American Hustle," with a single dissenter going for "Nebraska."

Similarly, 14 of GoldDerby's experts chose "12 Years a Slave" as the best drama, with the other five going for Alfonso Cuarón's brilliantly-made space thriller "Gravity."

If such equations take much of the suspense out of the show, there's still plenty of other reasons to tune in to the broadcast. Last year Tina Fey and Amy Poehler earned some of the strongest raves ever for hosts of an awards show with their charming, down-to-earth and often hilarious stint as the co-hosts. Fey and Poehler are returning to host again this year.

Film fans also will not want to miss the cavalcade of glamorous stars strutting the red carpet, and enjoying Champagne and a gourmet dinner made with local California ingredients.

This year's faces will include Cate Blanchett, Sandra Bullock, Judi Dench, Emma Thompson and Kate Winslet, who are up for best actress in a comedy or musical, as well as Amy Adams, Julie Delpy, Greta Gerwig, Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Meryl Streep, who are competing for the best dramatic actress prize.

Among the men, Christian Bale, Bruce Dern, Leonardo DiCaprio, Oscar Isaac and Joaquin Phoenix are the nominees for the best actor in a comedy or musical, while Chiwetel Ejiofor, Idris Elba, Tom Hanks, Matthew McConaughey and Robert Redford are vying for the dramatic acting award.



Key nominations

Best Motion Picture, Drama

"12 Years a Slave"
"Captain Phillips"
"Gravity"
"Philomena"
"Rush"

Best Motion Picture, Comedy or Musical

"American Hustle"
"Her"
"Inside Llewyn Davis"
"Nebraska"
"The Wolf of Wall Street"

Best Actress in a Motion Picture, Drama

Cate Blanchett, "Blue Jasmine"
Sandra Bullock, "Gravity"
Judi Dench, "Philomena"
Emma Thompson, "Saving Mr. Banks"
Kate Winslet, "Labor Day"

Best Actor in a Motion Picture, Drama

Chiwetel Ejiofor, "12 Years a Slave"
Idris Elba, "Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom"
Tom Hanks, "Captain Phillips"
Matthew McConaughey, "Dallas Buyers Club"
Robert Redford, "All Is Lost"

Best Actress in a Motion Picture, Comedy or Musical

Amy Adams, "American Hustle"
Julie Delpy, "Before Midnight"
Greta Gerwig, "Frances Ha"
Julia Louis-Dreyfus, "Enough Said"
Meryl Streep, "August: Osage County"

Best Actor in a Motion Picture, Comedy or Musical

Christian Bale, "American Hustle"
Bruce Dern, "Nebraska"
Leonardo DiCaprio, "The Wolf of Wall Street"
Oscar Isaac, "Inside Llewyn Davis"
Joaquin Phoenix, "Her"

Best Animated Feature Film

"The Croods"
"Despicable Me 2"
"Frozen"

Best Screenplay, Motion Picture

Spike Jonze, "Her"
Bob Nelson, "Nebraska"
Jeff Pope, Steve Cogan, "Philomena"
John Ridley, "12 Years a Slave"
Eric Warren Singer, David O. Russell, "American Hustle"

Best Television Series, Drama

"Breaking Bad"
"Downton Abbey"
"The Good Wife"
"House of Cards"
"Masters of Sex"

Best Television Series, Comedy Or Musical

"The Big Bang Theory"
"Brooklyn Nine-Nine"
"Girls"
"Modern Family"
"Parks and Recreation"
— Deutsche Presse-Agentur GmbH (Hamburg, Germany)

NATION



Ramon Rivera, center, founded the "Mariachi Huenachi" program.

Mariachi band has dreams of playing the college circuit

By MANUEL VALDES
The Associated Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — By the end of a weekend last month, the big achievement among Ramon Rivera's high school mariachi band wasn't that it had logged more than 700 miles in a bus packed with musical instruments or that they had played two shows in front of large audiences.

It was that eight band members, all sons and daughters of Latino farmworkers from the agricultural city of Wenatchee, had been accepted into Washington State University — the first in their families to gain admission to college.

"They could be the next lawyers, senators, doctors, and the next president of the United States," Rivera told a cheering theater crowd that weekend during one of the band's shows.

The news was one of the success stories from Wenatchee High School, where officials created a mariachi program to connect children of farmworkers in the heart of Washington state's apple country with their heritage.

School officials say the class has helped students center themselves and has even helped graduation rates.

It's not just for farmworker kids, however. Everyone's invited, and some non-Latino kids have joined.

"Mariachi is a leadership class for our students because it teaches them self-discipline, teaches them to work hard, teaches them how to be on time, teaches them to speak in front of an audience," Rivera said.

"These are skills that can't be put down on a test," said Rivera, who moved to Wenatchee from the Los Angeles area in 2006 to take over the program, and reinforced the program's focus on higher education.

Wenatchee, in north central Washington state, is built on agriculture, sending millions of apples, cherries and pears worldwide. Many of the fruits are picked by immigrant farmworkers from Mexico and Central



PHOTOS BY TED S. WARREN/AP

Top and above: Members of Wenatchee High School's "Mariachi Huenachi" program perform outside CenturyLink Field prior to a Seattle Sounders MLS soccer game. Officials say the program, created to connect children of farmworkers with their heritage, has raised graduation rates.

America. Some of their children work summers in the fields.

To connect with them, the school district created the program using Mexico's mariachi music in 1997. The program is dubbed "Mariachi Huenachi" for the Spanish phonetic spelling of Wenatchee.

Now more than 300 students in the high school and middle school learn the soulful ballads.

More than 45 percent of students at the Wenatchee school district are Latino; 20 percent are migrant students. Nearly 60 percent of students are on free or reduced meal programs, an indicator of poverty, according to state figures.

Rivera is fully aware of those economic realities.

"I think the best key to get out of poverty is to get your educa-

tion. The best way to help your family is to get your education," he said.

To reach his students, Rivera approaches his task from various angles. First, he requires a 3.0 GPA to play.

To perform with the traveling group, students must try out. Students in the top group are well-versed in playing the violin, guitar, trumpet and the "guitaron" — a large six-string guitar used by mariachis. Some students also must sing.

He keeps his students busy, filling in many weekends with performances across the state. One weekend it's a gig at the Sounders soccer game in Seattle. Another weekend is a show at a Tacoma theater or at the state capital in Olympia for Gov. Jay Inslee.

The students also play at senior

centers around their town.

They log their activities, and use them to improve their college, scholarship and job applications.

For the 25-member traveling class, which is the varsity group of the whole program and usually for juniors and seniors, those trips are important beyond the chance to sing in front different audiences.

Along with shows, Rivera tries to schedule visits to universities and community colleges. That way, students whose families don't have the means to go on college tours get to visit a campus.

At the colleges, counselors meet with the students to inform them about scholarships and loans.

"If I was at home, I wouldn't be able to," student Yajara Ramirez said. "My family can't drive six, four hours away from home be-

cause I want to go to college. That's not possible for me. We have to take care of six other kids."

Rivera's efforts have been lauded by the University of Washington, which gave his program a certificate of recognition last year. The eight students accepted at Washington State University were given certificates in a ceremony in November.

Since then, another student has been accepted into college this school year.

"It's our responsibility as educators and as a teacher to show outside Wenatchee, show outside what's at the high school, show them every single thing that's possible out there," Rivera said.

"This is the United States. Everyone has a possibility," he added.

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OPINION

Boeing won the vote, but at what cost?

By HEDRICK SMITH
Los Angeles Times

The narrowly approved contract agreement between Boeing and its Washington state workforce will be hailed by some as a victory for the canny, hardball brinkmanship of Boeing's management and the knuckle-under economic pragmatism of the International Machinists Union.

But the steep cutbacks in retirement and health benefits that tens of thousands of Boeing workers were forced to swallow have far larger implications for middle-class America.

Boeing's stingy treatment of its highly skilled workforce offers a vivid example of how America's new economy has created gaping economic inequalities and steadily squeezed the economic life out of the U.S. middle class over the last three decades, even as corporate profits and CEO pay have skyrocketed.

Boeing's case epitomizes that sharp economic divide. For just as the company was wringing concessions from its workers, its board of directors approved a 50 percent increase in the company's stock dividend and a \$10 billion stock buyback that will richly reward investors and executives who get paid in Boeing shares.

Boeing contends that it is not the first to impose such concessions but that it is merely following the market.

True enough. In 1980, 84 percent of American workers at companies with 100 or more employees received lifetime pensions from their companies, and 70 percent got health insurance fully paid for by their employers. Today, fewer than 30 percent have lifetime pensions and only 18 percent have fully employer-paid health insurance.

What these numbers mean is that every year hundreds of billions of dollars in benefit costs have been shifted from company books to the pocketbooks and checkbooks of average Americans, helping to boost corporate profits and to leave roughly half of the baby boom generation facing near poverty in retirement.

For President Barack Obama and others who advocate a faster, faster-growing economy, it is instructive to understand how Boeing put the screws to its 56,000 workers around Seattle and Everett, Wash.

In a take-it-or-leave-it jobless ultimatum



ELAINE THOMPSON/AP

Boeing machinist Edjorge greets fellow workers heading to a union hall Jan. 3 to vote against a contract that would concede some pension and health care benefits to secure assembly of the company's new 77X airplane in Washington state.

last November, Boeing declared that if its current workforce wanted to build the next generation of 777X airliners, it would have to agree to about \$1 billion of cuts in previously promised pay increases for younger workers, to sharp increases in employee contributions to health care, and to a massive restructuring of Boeing's retirement plans. Boeing said it was freezing its pension plan, shifting tens of thousands of machinists into a far less generous 401(k)-type plan, and would then steadily reduce company contributions, year after year.

When that formula was put to a vote in November, the company's 51,000 rank-and-file machinists rejected Boeing's terms by a vote margin of 2 to 1. Boeing was ready, perhaps even eager, for that outcome, and despite Washington state's offer of \$8.7 billion in tax concessions, Boeing invited other states to bid on hosting the 777X production.

By Christmas, Boeing had lured 22 states into a massive job auction, ready to reward the lowest bidder — the state offering the lowest tax rate, lowest worker benefits and wages, and lowest cost to Boeing (i.e., largest state subsidy) to finance the \$10 billion cost of new aircraft plants.

Boeing said it had to cut costs to meet "aggressive international competition." But Boeing's sole major global competitor is Airbus, based in highly unionized Germa-

ny and France, and Airbus puts a premium on maintaining its high-quality workforce and treating its workers generously.

Inside Boeing, some people must have had some second thoughts. Even while noisily threatening to move out of state, Boeing sweetened its offer to its Washington workforce. In late December, it added an estimated \$1 billion in value, restoring previous pay scales for newer workers and upping the contract-signing bonus to \$15,000 per worker. But Boeing still insisted on steep retirement and health benefit cuts.

Local union leaders opposed the new package. National union leaders called for a second vote last Friday, and the Boeing contract passed narrowly, by 51 percent. Some union leaders hope to gain leverage and better terms once the 777X goes into production.

But rolling back the clock on the shrinking middle-class share of America's economy is hardly a new tactic. It has been used lately. For now, the Boeing formula represents the kind of successful corporate power play that prompted Pope Francis recently to chastise modern capitalism for imposing "the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose."

Hedrick Smith is the author of "Who Stole the American Dream?" and former Washington bureau chief of The New York Times. This column first appeared in the Los Angeles Times.

Congress should extend jobless benefits

Washington Post editorial

WITH THE surprising support of six Republicans, the Senate on Tuesday mustered the 60 votes necessary to proceed on extending emergency unemployment benefits for an additional three months, at a cost of \$6.5 billion. That is good news for the 1.3 million unemployed workers who have been laid off so long that they have exhausted their unemployment insurance. It is also good news for another roughly 1.9 million at risk of exhausting their benefits later this year.

The long-term unemployed, defined as those out of work for at least 27 weeks, make up more than 37 percent of all the United States' jobless. This is an unusually high level of long-term unemployment so long after the ostensible start of a recovery from a recession. The U.S. economy's strong growth rate in the third quarter of 2013, and the prospect, according to several forecasters, that 2014 will bring more job creation, offer little reason to expect that unemployment insurance may be the last. Still, the continuing weakness of the

U.S. labor market is a reality, one of the uglier aspects of the Great Recession and its aftermath — a reality sufficient to justify further aid.

Certainly, today's unemployment rate of 7 percent, in the context of a shrunken labor force, undermines Republican arguments that more benefits would enable recipients to avoid seeking employment, or, as Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., put it, "to become part of this perpetual unemployed group in our economy." Economic theory does, indeed, suggest that overly lengthy or generous unemployment compensation discourages work; that has been problematic in certain European countries. In the United States, where benefits generally do not exceed 50 percent of prior earnings, the best evidence suggests that extending unemployment insurance benefits now would increase the unemployment rate by only a few tenths of a percentage point. And that would mostly be because of a statistical quirk, not perverse incentives: Many long-term unemployed would cease seeking work once they lost their benefits and thus no longer count as part of the labor force. It may actually be efficient to help some

workers stay unemployed a bit longer, until a job comes along that matches their skills, rather than force them to waste those skills on the first available position. We're more skeptical of Democratic claims that extending unemployment benefits would stimulate recipients' spending and thus boost economic growth. Any such Keynesian fillip is likely to be minuscule at best, just as the \$6.5 billion increase in the budget deficit is too small to warrant GOP demands that extended benefits be offset by spending cuts elsewhere.

Instead of rehearsing these hoary arguments, we'd like to see Republicans and Democrats discuss ways to reform unemployment insurance programs to maximize relief to the unemployed and incentives to get back on the job. Economist Michael Strain of the American Enterprise Institute suggests cash bonuses, paid with unemployment insurance funds, as a reward to the unemployed when they find work. Ultimately, the best answer to long-term joblessness is restoring rapid economic growth, a subject to which Congress must turn as soon as the unemployment benefits fight is over.

OPINION

What newspapers are saying at home

The following editorial excerpts are selected from a cross section of newspapers throughout the United States. The editorials are provided by The Associated Press and other statewide syndicates.

Using less electricity

The (Rock Hill, S.C.) Herald
As of Jan. 1, production of 40- and 60-watt light bulbs was banned as part of efficiency standards signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2007. While some will miss the old incandescent bulbs, the move is part of a successful effort to make the nation more energy efficient.

The government phased out 75- and 100-watt incandescent bulbs over the past few years. The latest ban will have a bigger impact on consumers because 40- and 60-watt bulbs are the most popular on the market.

When the first practical incandescent bulb was devised by Thomas A. Edison, it was a scientific and engineering marvel, cutting edge technology for its time. By the time its production came to an end last Wednesday, it had become obsolete, an energy hog compared with compact fluorescent bulbs, or CFLs, and light emitting diode bulbs, or LEDs.

Both of those more efficient bulbs are increasingly more expensive than an incandescent bulb. But with much longer lifespans, sometimes lasting years, the new bulbs save considerable money over the long run.

The new light bulbs are just part of a growing array of more energy efficient products that have allowed Americans to significantly cut the amount of electricity consumed in homes and businesses. The Energy Information Administration recently announced that in 2013, the average amount of electricity consumed in U.S. homes fell to levels last seen more than a decade ago.

Big appliances such as refrigerators and air conditioners also have become more efficient, thanks in large part to federal energy standards that grow stricter every few years as technology evolves. Even new TVs are far more efficient than the old cathode ray tube sets.

Desktop computers, once cutting edge, gobble much more energy than a portable tablet or smart phone, which are designed to use battery power sparingly. It costs \$1.36 to power an iPad for a year, compared with \$28.21 for a desktop, according to the Electric Power Research Institute.

Some may complain about a "nanny government" that sets insulation standards and takes away our incandescent bulbs. But increasing efficiency remains the most effective way to reduce energy usage.

Not only does saving energy money, it also plays a key strategic role in reducing the nation's reliance on foreign oil. And more efficient electronic devices also have the benefit of reducing consumption of carbon fuels, consequently reducing damage to the environment.

Medicaid expansion costs

The Albany (Ga.) Herald
Politicians, at least if they're honest, will tell you that the biggest problem with legislation is unintended consequences.

That may be what we're running into as the Affordable Care Act continues to be implemented.

President Barack Obama's signature domestic legislation is off to a rocky start as federal officials work the kinks out of a flawed registration system. So far, the number of Americans who have obtained new coverage under ObamaCare pales in comparison with the number of Ameri-



Secretary of State John Kerry steps off the plane upon his arrival in Israel on Jan. 2 to broker Mideast peace talks that are entering a difficult phase.

cans who had their coverage pulled out from under them by the act. There are also concerns about the security of the system and its ability to protect the privacy of the information required of those who sign up.

An even more unsettling development came to light last week when one of the biggest selling points of the part of the program that expands Medicaid coverage turns out to not be the case in the only real sampling of its implementation. Proponents of expanding Medicaid coverage argued that it would lessen the stress on hospital emergency rooms because the newly covered individuals would use primary health care instead.

It appears the effect is just the opposite. A study published in the *Journal Science* found that emergency room use by Medicaid patients increased by 40 percent, which some experts think could increase emergency room spending at U.S. hospitals by \$500 million a year rather than reduce it.

With the administration's estimate that 8.7 million people will be added to Medicaid in the United States this year, it means that federal taxpayers will shoulder much of the initial cost for the 26 states that went along with the Affordable Care Act and expanded their Medicaid coverage. But while the federal government is picking up that tab at first, that federal support will decrease and those states — and their taxpayers — will have to pick up a sizable tab in the not-too-distant future.

Georgia didn't expand its Medicaid program, though there is a growing political effort in the state calling for it to happen.

The climate under the Gold Dome isn't likely to change in the coming session, and in this case that is probably the best avenue of approach. The Affordable Care Act is flawed and first needs to be fixed by the federal lawmakers and the administration who created it before Georgia considers any Medicaid expansion.

Mideast peace prospects

Los Angeles Times
In its quest for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, the United States has pursued essentially the same objective over several administrations. So when Secretary of State John F. Kerry announced during his latest round of shuttle diplomacy that "we can achieve a permanent-status agreement that results in two states for two peoples if we stay focused," skepticism was understandable.

Not just because the peace process has been so tragically unsuccessful over the last 15 years, but because even today, each side seems intent on thumbing its nose at the other. Just last week, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas enraged many Israelis when he offered

a hero's welcome to a group of recently released Palestinian prisoners, many of whom had been convicted of attacking or killing Israelis. Israel infuriated Palestinians by announcing, on the eve of Kerry's arrival, that it would build yet more settlements in the West Bank.

There is also some reason for guarded optimism. First, Kerry has invested immense energy in trying to achieve an agreement. Second, despite periodic allegations of bad faith, Israelis and Palestinians are seriously talking to each other after a long rupture. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has grudgingly endorsed the notion of a two-state solution, though Palestinian and some Israelis doubt his sincerity. Finally, Saudi Arabia is supporting Kerry's effort.

There is little doubt about what the "framework" Kerry is seeking would contain: a partition between Israel and a Palestinian state that would generally follow Israel's pre-1967 borders, but with exchanges of territory to bring some Jewish settlements on the West Bank under Israeli sovereignty; a resolution of the status of Jerusalem that would allow for the establishment of a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem or nearby; a recognition that most Palestinians whose families were displaced in 1948 would be able to return to the new Palestinian state rather than Israel, perhaps with compensation; and guarantees that an independent Palestine wouldn't be a staging ground for attacks against Israel.

In recent years, Netanyahu has demanded that the Palestinians recognize Israel not only as an independent nation but as a "Jewish state," a designation he has called "the real key to peace." In one sense, the notion of Israel as a Jewish state is obvious: It was founded as a haven for the Jewish people. But Israel also is home to 1.6 million Arabs, 20 percent of the population. For Palestinians, being required to recognize Israel as a Jewish state would be a ratification of second-class citizenship for Israel's Arabs.

Disagreement over this issue shouldn't be a deal-breaker. The Jewish character of Israel doesn't depend on any blessing from the Palestinians. If an agreement is reached in which the Palestinians recognize Israel and commit to ending hostilities — and in which both sides agree on borders, Jerusalem, security and the refugee question — that would be an extraordinary achievement that would be felt around the region and around the world.

Protecting football players

Kansas City Star
The life-altering damage caused by concussions to National Football League players have received much attention in recent

months, and appropriately so. The NFL for too many years ignored its responsibilities to better protect players.

However, tens of thousands of concussions and other brain injuries occur each year to football players at the college, high school and even pee-wee levels of the sport across America.

Parents, coaches and school officials need to be more involved in finding ways to prevent concussions. Coaches, along with trainers, must be aggressive in making sure players do not take part in games until they have recovered from possible concussions.

Baseline concussion testing should be required for all players at the high school and college levels because individuals react differently to brain injuries. The National Federation of High Schools and the National Collegiate Athletic Association should put together more comprehensive concussion education programs.

One barrier to progress: Players, parents and coaches sometimes don't recognize concussions when they occur. Or players want to or are told to "play through" head injuries.

That kind of destructive attitude can lead to permanently harming the health of a young football player. Get rid of the macho posturing in the sport, and take injuries to the brain more seriously.

Help middle class, tax rich

The (N.J.) Star-Ledger
Here's the sad truth about the so-called "economic recovery" that began in June 2009: For a large number of Americans, it simply doesn't exist.

As the stock market made giant gains and corporate profits hit record highs, the median income in America has only declined further. Blacks got hit hardest of all: While median income overall has dropped about 4 percent since 2009, for blacks, it plummeted by 10.9 percent.

In other words, the recession isn't over for most Americans. This speaks to the fundamental economic injustice that inspired the Occupy Wall Street protests two years ago, and President Barack Obama's central argument today: Widening income inequality is the challenge of our time and should be the issue that shapes the 2016 election.

What we really need now is vigorous government efforts to create jobs. Instead of slashing public programs, we must invest in middle-class Americans in order to rekindle the demand that creates and grows jobs. That means raising taxes on the rich and applying more funding to areas such as infrastructure, research and education.

Leading Republicans say they're against tax increases because they hinder job creation. There is more to it. Taxes help contain the debt and allow the government to make investments that strengthen the economy, such as spending on infrastructure, research and education. The truth is that economic growth has been stronger during periods of higher tax rates on top earners.

The self-serving argument that the prosperity of so-called "job creators" will somehow trickle down to the average American is just as baseless. The richest Americans save more of their earnings than others do and will never spend enough to make up for the tens of millions of Americans who remain unemployed or underemployed and the effect of stagnant and declining wages.

Consider these numbers: In recent decades, the incomes of the wealthiest 400 Americans grew five times larger, as their tax rates declined by nearly half. CEO pay grew 127 times faster over the past three decades than the pay of the average worker.

Unless we take real steps to reverse these trends, for most people, "economic recovery" will remain out of reach.

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Few wearables balance style, function

By PETER SVENSSON
The Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Gadget lovers are slipping on fitness bands that track movement and are buckling on smartwatches that let them check phone messages.

Some brave souls are even donning Google's geeky-looking Glass eyewear.

For the technology industry, this is exciting time, but also a risky one. No one really knows

whether the average consumer can be enticed to make gadgets part of their everyday attire.

The question is: Can tech companies create wearables with the right mix of function and fashion?

Wearable computing devices are igniting an explosion of hope and creativity that's engaged both startups and big companies including Samsung, Sony, LG and others. At the International Consumer Electronics Show this

week, companies are showing off hundreds of new watches, wristbands and eyeglasses with built-in video screens or cameras.

The industry is encouraged by the attention Google's Glass is getting. The device is worn like a pair of glasses and projects a small video screen into the wearer's field of vision. Companies are also encouraged by the success — albeit on a small scale — of the Pebble and Samsung Galaxy Gear smartwatches.

The wearables industry is haunted by an earlier false start: Bluetooth headsets, which were commonplace a few years ago, fell out of favor. The shift away from phone calls and toward texting was one factor, but may be it simply became uncool to walk around in public with a listening device protruding from one's ear.

It's easier to persuade consumers to wear gadgets on their wrists, and that's where most of the industry's energy is focused.

EUROPE GAS PRICES

Country	Super E10	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Germany	\$3.569	\$3.750	\$3.827	\$4.147
Change in price	+0.1 cents	+1.0 cents	+0.8 cents	+0.7 cents
Netherlands	—	\$4.693	\$4.989	\$5.078
Change in price	—	-1.0 cents	-0.8 cents	+1.6 cents
U.K.	—	\$3.685	\$3.862	\$4.082
Change in price	—	+1.0 cents	+0.8 cents	+0.7 cents
Azores	—	—	\$4.482	—
Change in price	—	—	No change	—
Italy	—	\$3.876	\$4.029	\$4.287
Change in price	—	No change	No change	No change
Turkey	—	—	\$4.445	\$4.015*
Change in price	—	—	No change	+0.7 cents
Italy	\$3.936	—	—	—
Change in price	No change	—	—	No change

PACIFIC GAS PRICES

Country	Unleaded	Super unleaded	Super plus	Diesel
Japan	—	\$3.509	—	\$3.899
Change in price	—	+1.0 cents	—	No change
Okunawa	\$3.519	—	—	\$3.899
Change in price	+1.0 cents	—	—	No change
South Korea	\$3.589	—	\$3.949	\$4.169
Change in price	No change	—	+1.7 cents	+1.6 cents
Guam	\$3.899**	\$3.759	\$3.939	—
Change in price	No change	+1.0 cents	+1.0 cents	—

* Diesel EFD ** Midgrade
For the week of Jan. 11-17

MARKET WATCH

Jan. 8, 2014

Dow Jones Industrials -68.20
16,462.74

Nasdaq composite +12.43
4,165.61

Standard & Poor's 500 -0.39
1,837.49

Russell 2000 -0.17
1,157.46

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (Jan. 10)	\$1.3953
Dollar buys (Jan. 10)	€0.7167
British pound (Jan. 10)	\$1.69
Japanese yen (Jan. 10)	102.00
South Korean won (Jan. 10)	1,038.00

Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770
British pound	\$1.6456/0.6977
Canada (dollar)	1.0848
China (Yuan)	6.0552
Denmark (Krone)	5.682
Egypt (Pound)	0.9525
Euro	\$1.3571/0.7369
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7547
Hungary (Forint)	220.42
Israel (Shekel)	3.5019
Japan (Yen)	104.94
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.2824
Norway (Krone)	6.2027
Philippines (Peso)	44.78
Poland (Zloty)	3.3072
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7505
Singapore (Dollar)	1.2713
South Korea (won)	1,065.10
Switzerland (Franc)	0.9101
Thailand (Baht)	33.05
Turkey (New Lira)	2.1840

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the United Kingdom, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	3.25
Discount rate	7.25
Federal funds market rate	0.07
3-month bill	0.06
30-year bond	3.89

WEATHER OUTLOOK



Friday's US temperatures

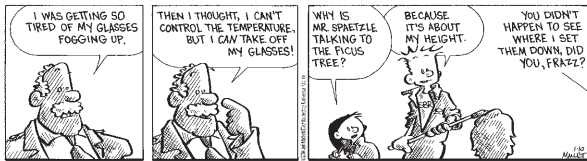
City	Hi	Lo	Wthr	Chattanooga	53	37	Cldy	Fort Wayne	38	24	Cldy	Louisville	50	34	Cldy	Pocatello	39	23	Cldy	Sioux City	34	17	Cldy
Ablene, Tex	64	51	Rain	Chattanooga	33	25	Snow	Fresno	61	36	Cir	Lubbock	59	38	Cir	Portland, Maine	34	12	Cldy	Sioux Falls	31	17	Cldy
Akron, Ohio	40	26	Cldy	Chicago	38	24	Rain	Goodland	41	26	PCldy	Macon	54	40	Cldy	Portland, Ore.	49	43	Rain	South Bend	38	23	Rain
Albany, N.Y.	34	12	Snow	Cincinnati	47	33	Cldy	Grand Junction	36	14	Cldy	Madison	35	14	Rain	Providence	39	18	Cldy	Spartanburg	38	31	Cldy
Albuquerque	45	28	Cir	Cleveland	39	25	Cldy	Grand Rapids	37	20	Cldy	Medford	50	34	Cldy	Pueblo	48	38	PCldy	Springfield, Ill.	41	29	Rain
Allentown, Pa.	38	21	Cldy	Colorado Springs	40	21	PCldy	Great Falls	45	30	Cir	Memphis	57	40	Cldy	Reno/High-Durham	44	34	Cldy	Springfield, Mo.	48	33	Rain
Anchorage	52	31	Cldy	Columbia, S.C.	53	38	Cldy	Green Bay	33	13	Cldy	Miami Beach	82	72	Cldy	Rapid City	40	22	Cldy	Tulsa	57	30	Snow
Asheville	48	31	Cldy	Columbia, S.C.	55	41	Cldy	Greensboro, N.C.	41	33	Cldy	Midland-Odessa	61	46	PCldy	Reino	53	24	Cldy	Tallahassee	70	51	Cldy
Atlanta	51	31	Cldy	Columbus, Ohio	53	31	Cldy	Hartford	38	22	Cldy	Milwaukee	36	20	Rain	Richmond	48	31	Cldy	Tampa	81	64	Cldy
Atlantic City	46	25	Cldy	Concord, N.H.	33	7	Cldy	Hartford Spgflld	36	14	Cldy	Mpls-St Paul	32	14	Cldy	Roanoke	41	30	Cldy	Tempe	44	31	Cldy
Austin	46	25	Cldy	Corpus Christi	77	62	Cldy	Helena	43	26	Cldy	Missoula	38	24	Snow	Rochester	38	19	Cldy	Topeka	40	28	Rain
Baltimore	42	27	Cldy	Dallas-Ft Worth	64	50	Rain	Honolulu	81	68	Rain	Montgomery	61	40	Cldy	Rockford	36	20	Cldy	Tucson	60	39	PCldy
Baton Rouge	67	45	Rain	Dayton	43	31	Cldy	Houston	71	58	Rain	Nashville	55	37	Cldy	Sacramento	61	36	PCldy	Tulsa	53	39	Cldy
Bilings	40	26	Cir	Daytona Beach	79	64	Cldy	Indianapolis	56	39	Cldy	New Orleans	66	50	Rain	St. Petersburg	78	65	PCldy	Tulsa	57	39	Cldy
Birmingham	57	39	Cldy	Denver	47	32	PCldy	Indianapolis	41	29	Cldy	New York City	40	27	Cldy	St. Thomas	84	73	PCldy	Waco	67	54	Rain
Bismarck	32	14	Cldy	Des Moines	36	22	Snow	Jackson, Miss.	61	39	Rain	Newark	39	26	Cldy	Salem, Ore.	52	43	Rain	Washington	44	31	Cldy
Boise	38	28	Cldy	Detroit	37	22	Cldy	Jacksonville	74	54	Cldy	Norfolk, Va.	51	37	Cldy	Salt Lake City	40	20	Cldy	W. Palm Beach	82	71	Cldy
Boston	37	19	Cldy	El Paso	56	39	PCldy	Kansas City	38	27	Cldy	North Platte	41	20	Snow	San Diego	65	52	Cldy	Wichita	43	31	Cldy
Bridgport	36	22	Cldy	Elkins	59	26	Cldy	Key West	78	73	Cldy	Oklahoma City	55	40	Rain	San Francisco	59	44	Cldy	Wichita Falls	61	44	Rain
Brownsville	80	65	Cir	Erie	38	21	Cldy	Knoxville	54	33	Cldy	Omaha	34	22	Snow	San Jose	62	39	Cir	Wikes-Barre	37	20	Snow
Buffalo	38	19	Cldy	Eugene	51	43	Cldy	Lake Charles	66	50	Rain	Orlando	82	62	Cldy	San Francisco	59	44	Cldy	Wilmington, Del.	43	25	Cldy
Burlington, Vt.	31	9	PCldy	Evansville	49	32	Cldy	Lansing	36	19	Cldy	Padsuch	31	33	Cldy	Seattle	59	44	Cldy	Yonkers	46	30	Cldy
Caribou, Maine	18	-9	Cldy	Fairbanks	13	-17	Cir	Las Vegas	61	39	PCldy	Pendleton	48	37	Cldy	Santa Fe	39	22	PCldy	Yonkers	46	30	Cldy
Charleston, S.C.	63	44	Cldy	Fargo	28	13	Cir	Lexington	50	33	Cldy	Peoria	38	27	Cldy	St. Louis	51	32	Cldy	Yonkers	46	30	Cldy
Charleston, W.Va.	52	32	Cldy	Flagstaff	42	20	Cir	Lincoln	35	24	Cldy	Philadelphia	42	26	Cldy	Savannah	64	44	Cldy	Yonkers	46	30	Cldy
Charlotte, N.C.	46	34	Cldy	Fort Smith	54	36	Rain	Little Rock	55	36	Cir	Phoenix	68	44	Cldy	Seattle	50	42	Cldy	Yonkers	46	30	Cldy
							Los Angeles	72	48	Cir	Pittsburgh	43	26	Cldy	Shreveport	63	45	Cldy	Yonkers	46	30	Cldy	

National temperature extremes

Hi: Wed., 74, Saugus, Calif.
Lo: Mon., 13, Fort Collins, Colo.
W: Mon., 13, Fort Collins, Colo.
S: Mon., 13, Fort Collins, Colo.
M: Mon., 13, Fort Collins, Colo.

National temperature extremes
Hi: Wed., 74, Saigon, Calif.
Lo: Wed., -35, Crane Lake, Minn.

Frazz



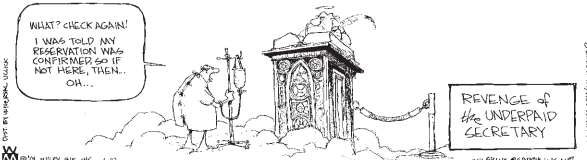
Dilbert



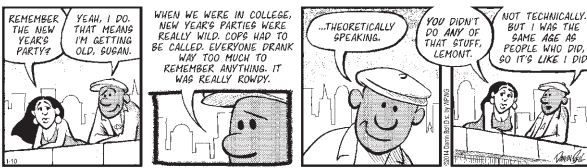
Pearls Before Swine



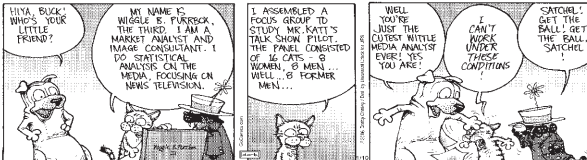
Non Sequitur



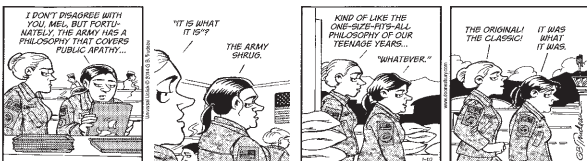
Candorville



Get Fuzzy



Doonesbury



Fort Knox



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 (Uncorrected)
- 4 Loathe
- 8 Money supply
- 12 Geological time
- 13 Came to earth
- 14 Sandwich treat
- 15 Utensil made from a gourd shell
- 17 Bound
- 18 Line of symmetry
- 19 Sockle's and Anjus
- 20 Trip around the world?
- 22 Crafty
- 24 Roll up (like a flag)
- 25 CPA's concerns
- 29 "Most Wanted" org.
- 30 In all
- 31 Fuss
- 32 1852-meter measures
- 34 Entreaty
- 35 Tattoo parlor supply
- 36 Be on either side of
- 37 Mote
- 40 Depressed
- 41 Sound of contentment
- 42 Tragedy
- 46 Best Picture of 2012
- 47 Individuals
- 48 Born
- 49 Old Dodge model

DOWN

- 1 Moment
- 2 George's brother
- 3 Toe of Italy's boot
- 4 Custom
- 5 "Sad to say ..."
- 6 "— the season ..."
- 7 Biblical verb suffix
- 8 Ill-fated queen
- 9 Vicinity
- 10 Approach
- 11 "Keystone" group of silients
- 16 Leaf-stem angle
- 19 Stage show
- 20 Does in, mob style
- 21 Hayseed
- 22 Cardiff's country
- 23 Troubles
- 25 Heft
- 26 Anti-itch lotion
- 27 Perfect place
- 28 Drench
- 30 Snitch
- 33 Millionth of a meter
- 34 Jack Homer's reward
- 36 Portable liquor bottle
- 37 Bridge
- 38 Unadulterated
- 39 Hence
- 40 Singer Campbell
- 42 Demure
- 43 "SNL" alumna
- 44 Afternoon social
- 45 Nevertheless

Answer to Previous Puzzle



1-10

CRYPTOQUIP

ZNXQAH VNMV ZBOPWMA
RFXQB HWZPQZZWYR ZTLBNXYT
PXLBXZWVWXY JO AMJOAOK

MY WYZVFQLOYV BMYOA?
Yesterday's Cryptquip: SINCE THAT HIP-HOP PERFORMER'S USUAL TOPICS ARE DREADFUL, HIS STAGE NAME IS THE GRIM RAPPER.
Today's Cryptquip Clue: O equals E

Dartmouth 4, Boston U. 2

MLB

Five things to know

Hall of Fame inductees reflect steroids effect

BY HOWIE RUBENGO
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Hall of Fame voters made up for last year's empty slate, electing Greg Maddux, Frank Thomas and Tom Glavine — three stars who've never been connected to performance-enhancing drugs.

On a day that turned out to be a celebration of first-timers on



Biggio

the ballot, Craig Biggio missed out on baseball's highest honor by two votes. Mike Piazza gained a bit of ground in his second year of eligibility, too, but nearly everyone else saw their percentage of votes drop — 75 percent is needed for admittance.

Award winners from the Steroids Era struck out again, and big-game ace Jack Morris missed on his 15th and final chance in voting by the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

Next year, chances don't improve for returnees with another crowded class of achievers.

The induction ceremony July 27 will be an Atlanta Braves reunion with Glavine and Maddux joined by their former manager Bobby Cox, who along with fellow skipper Joe Torre and Tony La Russa were selected by the expansion era committee.

Here are five things to know about the Hall of Fame voting revealed Wednesday:

1 Keep out: Another rough ballot for stars suspected of steroids use. Home run king Barry Bonds and seven-time Cy Young Award winner Roger Clemens were among several who saw their support drop. In their second year on the ballot, the BBWAA gave Clemens 35.4 percent of the vote and Bonds 34.7. Mark McGwire (11 percent) and Sammy Sosa (7.2 percent) fell as well. Rafael Palmeiro, with 3,020 hits and 569 homers, received the ultimate rebuke: He got only 25 votes (4.4

Tainted by performance-enhancing drugs?

Yearly voting percentages for five prominent players eligible for the Hall of Fame from the Steroids Era:

Player, Years Eligible	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr5	Yr6	Yr7	Yr8
Mark McGwire, 2007-14	23.5	23.6	21.9	23.7	19.8	19.5	16.9	11.0
Rafael Palmeiro, 2011-14	11.0	12.6	8.8	4.4x				
Roger Clemens, 2013-14	37.6	35.4						
Barry Bonds, 2013-14	36.2	34.7						
Sammy Sosa, 2013-14	12.5	7.2						

x-no longer eligible to be elected by the BBWAA

SOURCE: The Associated Press

percent), which is below the 5 percent threshold to remain on the ballot.

Whether the drop is a statement on the BBWAA's stance on PEDs or just a dip caused by the packed ballot is to be seen. But if Hall newcomer Thomas has his way, it won't get any easier for those with sullied reputations.

"Over the last year, doing a couple of charity events with Hall of Famers that are in, they've got a strong stance against anyone who's taken steroids. They do not want them in," he said. "I've got to take the right stance, too. No, they shouldn't get in."

2 Knock, knock: Biggio, the Houston Astros' second baseman with more than 3,000 hits, a Hall benchmark, received 427 votes (74.8 percent) after getting 388 last year in his first appearance. Even with another impressive list of first-time candidates next year, Biggio is on target to join the elite. His close call matched Nellie Fox in 1985 and Pie Traynor in 1947 for the smallest margin to just miss. They both eventually made it.

Whether it's suspicion of steroids use or a crowded field, Piazza, the career home runs leader for catchers, saw his chances for election improve, too. Piazza received 62.2 percent up from 57.8 last year.

3 Fading fast: Writers can vote for at most 10 candidates, and with a strong first-year group several players saw their vote totals go down, seriously hurting their chances for election. Tim Lincecum fell from 52.2 percent to 46.6 percent. Lee Smith, in his 12th year, dropped to 29.9 from 47.8. Curt Schilling tumbled to 29.2 percent after getting 38.8 percent in his

first appearance in 2013. Another player perhaps affected by the stench of steroids, Jeff Bagwell, saw his support decrease to 54.3 percent after two years of improving results. Unfortunately, the ballot remains chock full of talent next year.

4 Who voted? Attention always zeroes in on the players who come closest to election. But with Biggio falling two votes shy of election, it's worth a look at the bottom of the ballot. This year, Armando Benitez, Jacque Jones and Kenny Rogers each received a vote. All fine players with solid careers, but as is often said, it's the Hall of Fame, not the Hall of the very good.

5 Head of the class: There is little relief on next year's ballot for the holdovers. Maddux and Glavine's former teammate John Smoltz heads a worthy group that includes Randy Johnson, Pedro Martinez, Carlos Delgado and Gary Sheffield.

AP Sports Writers Andrew Seligman and Ronald Blum contributed to this report.

Voting

571 votes cast, 429 needed
Greg Maddux 555 (97.2%), Tom Glavine 525 (91.9), Frank Thomas 478 (83.7), Craig Biggio 427 (74.8), Mike Piazza 355 (62.2), Jack Morris 351 (61.5), Jeff Bagwell 310 (54.3), Tim Lincecum 283 (46.1), Roger Clemens 202 (35.4), Barry Bonds 198 (34.7), Lee Smith 171 (29.9), Curt Schilling 167 (29.2), Edgar Martinez 144 (25.2), Alan Trammell 119 (20.8), Mike Mussina 116 (20.3), Jeff Kent 87 (15.2), Tim Lincecum 67 (11.7), Mark McGwire 63 (11.0), Larry Walker 58 (10.2), Don Mattingly 47 (8.2), Sammy Sosa 41 (7.2).

By receiving fewer than 28 votes (less than 5 percent), Rafael Palmeiro 25 (4.4), Moises Alou 6 (1.1), Hideo Nomo 6 (1.1), Luis Gonzalez 5 (0.9), Eric Gagne 2 (0.4), J.T. Snow 2 (0.4), Armando Benitez 1 (0.2), Jacque Jones 1 (0.2), Kenny Rogers 1 (0.2), Sean Casey 0, Ray Durham 0, Todd Jones 0, Paul Lo Duca 0, Richie Sexson 0, Mike Timlin 0 are no longer eligible for election by the BBWAA.

— The Associated Press



Brian Kiersey/AP

The Chicago White Sox's Frank Thomas hits a three-run home run during the eighth inning of a game against Tampa Bay in Chicago on July 5, 2005. Thomas was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in voting by the Baseball Writers' Association of America on Wednesday. Joining him are pitchers Tom Glavine and Greg Maddux.

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Scoreboard

Roundup

Nets put an end to Warriors' run

Raptors 112, Pistons 91: Kyle Lowry had 21 points and nine assists, Jonas Valanciunas had 16 points and 11 rebounds,

with 4:07 remaining that gave them a 93-89 lead until Curry's jumper with 5.8 seconds to go.

"Certainly a tough loss" War-

NBA/NHL

Love blasts team as T-Wolves lose again

By JON KRAWCZYNSKI
The Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Kevin Love is usually one of the last Minnesota Timberwolves to be interviewed after a game, preferring



first to collect his thoughts as he goes through a treatment regimen that includes an extended dip in an icy cold tub that helps his body recover from the beating it takes on a nightly basis.

This time, Love was waiting for the media who trudged into the locker room after the Timberwolves' latest gut punch of a loss, a 104-103 defeat to the Phoenix Suns. This time, he had a message to deliver, and it wasn't pretty.

"We can't have two guys sitting at the ends of the bench that play good minutes just sitting there and not getting up during timeouts," Love said, referring to the poor body language exhibited by veterans J.J. Barea and Dante Cunningham in the fourth quarter. "We all need to be in this together. That kind of (tick) me off. We're supposed to be a team."

The Timberwolves (17-18) are anything but a team right now. They are a collection of individual agendas tripping each other up as the franchise pursues its first playoff bid since 2004.

It may only be January, but there may still be more than half the season left and key reserves Chase Budinger and Ronny Turiaf may have just returned to help bolster a beleaguered bench.

But all of that perspective and promise was nowhere to be found in the Wolves' locker room on Wednesday night, when a crackling tension threatened to break the team apart. In speaking out, Love was trying to be the leader this young and inexperienced team needs. He was trying to light a fire, as he often says, to motivate two teammates and get them to recognize the poor image they were projecting by pouting over lack of playing time.

"It's two guys that we expect more from them," Love said. "I think they expect more from themselves. I'm not trying to single anybody out and I don't want to make it bigger than it is, but it's just a team that we needed to beat tonight and we needed everybody in there, even guys that didn't play any minutes. We need to have a team and a bench that's really in it together."

Barea and Cunningham both were gone by the time Love made



Jim Mone/AP

The Minnesota Timberwolves' Kevin Love pulls his jersey over his head after the Phoenix Suns rallied to beat the Timberwolves 104-103 on Wednesday.

his comments. But it's likely not going to sit well, especially with Barea, who took exception earlier this month when Love criticized the struggles of the second unit.

Part of Love's frustration is rooted in last year's misery. He played just 18 games because of a twice-broken hand and a knee injury and drew criticism from inside the locker room and out for not being a visible presence with the team down the stretch. When Love saw Barea and Cunningham putting themselves before the team as Love had been accused of doing last year, he bristled.

"Those two guys, if and when I did not sit out when maybe I didn't last out (behind the bench) for the game for all 48 minutes and so on and so forth, they would've killed me," Love said. "They would've aired me out. That's tough."

It also speaks to the desperation that is creeping into the team's psyche. The Timberwolves haven't been over .500 since Nov. 23, having failed eight straight times to get over that hump since then. They are 0-10 in games decided by four points or fewer, a troubling stat for a team that is trying to keep pace in the hyper-competitive Western Conference.

Love is in the middle of a phenomenal individual season, having entered the game against the Suns second in the league in scoring (26.4 points per game) and rebounding (13.3). But in terms of his standing in the locker room, he is still trying to regain the respect he had before the difficulties of last season.

Many in Minnesota have worried about losing Love, who can opt out of his contract in the summer of 2015. Both Timberwolves President Phil Saunders and Love have expressed optimism about his future in Minnesota.

The focus now is squarely on the significant issues of the present. And as bad as things appeared on Wednesday night, Love said that he is confident they can turn things around.

NHL scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division									
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	SV%	PP%
Boston	43	26	13	2	58	136	91	92.1	21.4
Tampa Bay	43	26	13	4	56	123	102	92.0	18.6
Montreal	45	25	15	5	55	115	106	91.9	18.6
Detroit	43	19	14	10	48	114	121	91.4	18.6
Toronto	44	21	18	5	47	122	132	91.2	18.6
Ottawa	43	19	18	6	42	125	145	90.8	18.6
Florida	43	16	21	6	38	102	136	90.3	18.6
Buffalo	42	12	26	4	28	74	118	89.8	18.6

Metropolitan Division									
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	SV%	PP%
Pittsburgh	45	32	12	1	65	147	107	92.1	21.4
Philadelphia	44	23	17	4	50	117	119	91.7	21.4
N.Y. Rangers	45	22	20	3	47	111	121	91.1	21.4
Washington	43	20	18	5	46	128	128	91.0	21.4
Carolina	43	18	16	9	45	105	124	90.8	21.4
New Jersey	44	17	18	9	43	103	113	90.7	21.4
Columbus	43	19	18	6	42	117	125	90.6	21.4
N.Y. Islanders	45	16	22	7	39	124	149	90.2	21.4

Western Conference

Central Division									
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	SV%	PP%
Chicago	46	29	8	9	67	109	127	92.7	21.4
St. Louis	42	30	7	5	65	155	97	92.7	21.4
Colorado	45	23	17	4	58	127	111	92.0	21.4
Minnesota	45	23	17	5	51	108	114	91.4	21.4
Dallas	42	20	15	7	47	123	131	91.3	21.4
Nashville	44	19	16	9	44	105	131	90.8	21.4
Winnipeg	46	19	22	5	43	125	139	90.7	21.4

Pacific Division									
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	SV%	PP%
Anaheim	44	27	11	6	60	144	114	92.4	21.4
San Jose	44	27	11	6	60	144	114	92.4	21.4
Calgary	44	26	12	6	57	141	114	92.3	21.4
Vancouver	45	23	13	9	55	121	113	91.7	21.4
Edmonton	42	20	17	5	41	114	124	91.4	21.4
Calgary	43	15	22	6	36	100	137	90.3	21.4
Edmonton	46	14	27	5	33	119	161	90.1	21.4

Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss.

Wednesday's games
Philadelphia at Montreal 1
N.Y. Rangers 3, Chicago 2

Thursday's games
Florida at Tampa Bay
Dallas at New Jersey
Toronto at Carolina

Friday's games
Dallas at Calgary
Toronto at Washington
Carolina at Columbus

Saturday's games
N.Y. Islanders at Colorado
Pittsburgh at Edmonton
St. Louis at Vancouver

Wednesday
Avalanche 4, Senators 3 (OT)
Ottawa 1, Canadiens 1

Thursday
First Period—1. Colorado, McGinn 10 (Johnson, Holden), 2:19 (pp). 2. Colorado, Hejda 1 (Landeskog, Stastny), 4:55. 3. St. Louis, Turiaf 1 (Ryan), 15:02.

Second Period—4. Ottawa, Spezza 12 (MacArthur, Eriksson), 12:53 (pp). 5. Ottawa, Turris 11 (Stone, E.Karlsson), 17:11.

Third Period—6. Colorado, Stastny 13 (Landeskog, Barrie), 17:40.

Overtime—7. Colorado, Barrie 3 (Stastny, Landeskog), 3:33.

Goals on goal—Ottawa 11-12-9-0-32. Colorado 7-11-11-3-31.

Goals on goal—opportunities—Ottawa 1 of 3; Colorado 1 of 1.

Goals on goal—Ottawa 14-9-5 (31 shots-27 saves). Colorado, Varlamov 20-8-4 (32-29).

A—12,487 (18,007). T—2:19.

Rangers 3, Blackhawks 2
N.Y. Rangers 2 0 1-3
Chicago 1 0 0-2

First Period—1. N.Y. Rangers, Richards 11 (Callahan, Staal), 5:06. 2. N.Y. Rangers, Zuccarello 11 (Gretzky, Lindqvist), 8:29 (pp).

Second Period—3. Chicago, Toews 16 (Sharp, Keith), 6:17 (pp). 4. Chicago, Bollig 4 (Krugler), 8:05.

Third Period—5. N.Y. Rangers, Hagelin 11 (Staal, Richards), 14:03.

Goals on goal—N.Y. Rangers 9-12-11-32. Chicago 15-11-3-31.

Power-play opportunities—N.Y. Rangers 4 of 2; Chicago 1 of 1.

Goals—N.Y. Rangers, Lindqvist 13-16-3 (37 shots-35 saves). Chicago, Crawford 17-7-5 (32-29).

A—21,493 (19,717). T—2:22.

Flyers 3, Canadiens 1
Montreal 0 1 0-1
Philadelphia 2 1 0-3

First Period—1. Philadelphia, Gionta 1 (Lacavallari, Meszaros), 6:27. 2. Philadelphia, Rinaldo 1 (L.Schenn, Meszaros), 14:32.

Second Period—3. Philadelphia, Raffl 3 (Mazzariello, S.Schenn), 9:24. 4. Montreal, Plekanec 14 (Gionta), 17:37 (sh).

Third Period—None.

Goals on goal—Montreal 9-6-5-20. Philadelphia 9-12-6-27.

Power-play opportunities—Montreal 0 of 4; Philadelphia 0 of 4.

Goals—Montreal, Budaj 5-4-1 (27 shots-27 saves). Philadelphia, Mason 18-10-1 (20-19).

A—13,949 (19,541). T—2:22.

NHL roundup

Flyers remain hot, topple Canadiens

The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — From killing penalties to unlikely scorers, the Philadelphia Flyers are finding new ways to win at home.

Sean Couturier, Zac Rinaldo and Michael Raffl scored to lead the Flyers to their 10th straight home victory, 3-1 over the Montreal Canadiens on Wednesday.

The surging Flyers returned home after a 5-1 trip that sent them to second in the Metropolitan Division. Brushing off 1-7 and 4-1-0 starts to become one of the NHL's hottest teams, they are 9-2 since Dec. 17 and have found new life under coach Craig Berube.

"I think they're confident guys right now and they believe they can win," Berube said. "They're not always going to play their best hockey, but we're squeezing wins out."

The Flyers haven't lost at home since Nov. 7 against New Jersey. They're on their longest home winning streak since they won 11 straight Oct. 27-Dec. 5, 2003. The Flyers have won all 10 in regulation, their longest streak without OT since a 14-game regulation home winning streak from February 10-April 4, 1985. They won the last 14 home games of the regular season before making a run to the Stanley Cup Finals.

Steve Mason stopped 19 shots for his 18th win. Tomas Plekanec scored the Canadiens' only goal.

For whatever reason, most notably the coaching change from Peter Laviolette to Berube, the Flyers are simply a different team over the last three months. The offense that failed to score more

than two goals in a game though each of the first nine games has scored at least three in 11 of 12.

They've thrived on the penalty kill, also. Philadelphia was 4-for-4 on the PK against Montreal, its sixth consecutive perfect game (19-for-19) in that category.

"Penalty killing is about everybody on the ice being more committed than the power play, blocking shots, clearing pucks, goalies making big saves," Berube said.

Rangers 3, Blackhawks 2: Carl Hagelin broke a tie with 5:57 left to lift New York past Chicago after blowing a two-goal lead.

Marc Staal started the winning sequence with a long slap shot that was stopped by Corey Crawford, who also got in front of Hagelin's first rebound attempt. But Hagelin stayed with the play and flipped the puck into the open right side.

Brad Richards and Mats Zuccarello also scored for New York, which earned its first win in Chicago since 2009. Henrik Lundqvist made 35 saves.

Jonathan Toews and Brandon Bollig scored in the second period for Chicago, which had recorded at least one point in a season-high 10 games. It was the Blackhawks' first home regulation loss since losing to Dallas 4-3 on Dec. 3.

Avalanche 4, Senators 3 (OT): Paul Stastny had the tying goal and two assists and Tyson Barrie scored 33 seconds into overtime to complete host Colorado's comeback victory over Ottawa.

Jan Hejda and Jamie McGinn also scored for Colorado.



Matt Slocum/AP

Philadelphia Flyers goalie Steve Mason, left, blocks a shot as Montreal Canadiens right wing Brian Gionta looks back for the rebound in the first period of Wednesday's game in Philadelphia.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Georgia upsets No. 21 Mizzou

Tigers fade after leading by five early in overtime period

By R.B. FALLSTROM
The Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. — A day after attending a memorial service for his father in Garden City, Kan., Mark Fox called the shots in an upset that ended the nation's longest home winning streak.

Georgia's coach said the late Raymond Lewis Fox, a longtime high school coach in Kansas, wouldn't have had it any other way. Fox thought his dad would have been proud, but also would have wondered why it got past regulation.

"He would have patted me on the back. Hell no," Fox said after Georgia's 70-64 upset in overtime at No. 21 Missouri in a Southeastern Conference opener on Wednesday. "He'd have told me to get the next one."

Missouri coach Frank Haith

said he sensed before the game that players weren't mentally into it. The Tigers were outrebounded 43-34, including 15 offensive, and had less than a sense of urgency on both ends and took plays off.

"I hate cool," Haith said. "We were really too cool and I don't like cool. Cool gets you beat and cool got us beat tonight."

Haith is 40-2 at home in three seasons, the other setback to Kansas State on Feb. 21, 2012. The Tigers were ranked No. 3 for that one.

Missouri led by five early in overtime before fading. Jordan Clarkson held the ball for the final shot in regulation instead of passing for a better look, and freshman Johnathan Williams III blew a shot at a crowd-pleasing one-handed follow dunk with the Tigers leading by a point and 2:20 to go in regulation.

Fox recalled his father who



L.G. PATTERSON/AP

Georgia's Charles Mann, right, and Missouri's Wes Clark, left, battle for a loose ball during the first half of Wednesday's game in Columbia, Mo. The Bulldogs upset the No. 21 Tigers 70-64 in overtime.

died at 78 from lung diseases on Saturday, matched wits with the likes of longtime Purdue coach Gene Keady in Ellsworth, Kan.

"One of the last things he said was 'You've got to play some defense,'" Fox said. "He was right. My dad was a real tough son of

a gun.

"I got a little emotional at one point in the first half and caught myself — you know, 'I'm going to get my butt chewed when I get home.'"

Charles Mann scored 18 points, including the go-ahead

basket with 35.8 seconds to go in overtime, and Georgia overcame free-throw shooting struggles.

"Coach Fox had a bad couple days," Mann said. "So we just wanted to win it for him and just play hard. We just kept on believing."

Top 25 roundup

Brust, Dekker lead No. 4 Badgers past rival No. 23 Illini

The Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Ben Brust scored 18 points, Sam Dekker added 17 and No. 4 Wisconsin used a 20-0 run in the first half to beat No. 23 Illinois 95-70 on Wednesday night.

The Badgers (16-0, 3-0 Big Ten) are off to the best start in school history.

Wisconsin shot 53 percent from the field in the first half to open up a 25-point lead by halftime. The Illini (13-3, 2-1) stumbled badly in their debut this season as a Top 25 team and lost a sixth straight to their border rival.

Rayvonte Rice led Illinois with 19 points on 7-for-21 shooting.

No. 6 Wichita St. 66, Illinois St. 47: Cleanthony Early and Ron Baker each scored 11 points, and the Shockers routed the visiting Redbirds.

Wichita State (16-0, 3-0 Missouri Valley) extended both the longest winning streak and best start to a season in program history by holding Illinois State (8-7, 1-2) to 27 percent shooting (18-for-55).

No. 8 Villanova 83, Seton Hall 67: Darrun Hilliard scored 19 points and the host Wildcats hit a dozen three-pointers in a victory over the undermanned Pirates.

JayVaughn Pinkston added 17 points, Ryan Arcidiacono had 14 and the Wildcats (14-1, 3-0 Big East) shot 52 percent from the field and three-point range in beating Seton Hall (10-6, 1-2)



ANDY MANIS/AP

Wisconsin's Sam Dekker, right, shoots against Illinois' Jon Ekey during Wednesday's game in Madison, Wis. Wisconsin won 95-70.

for the 11th time in the last 12 games.

Brian Oliver had 20 points to lead Seton Hall. The Pirates played without swingman Fuquan Edwin, their second leading scorer, and Eugene Teague, their top rebounder.

No. 10 Florida 74, South Carolina 58: Scottie Wilbekin scored 17 points before leaving with a sprained right ankle, and the host Gators opened Southeastern Conference play with a victory over the Gamecocks.

Casey Prather and Patric Young added 13 points apiece for Florida. The Gators (12-2) won their sixth straight and tied a school record by winning their 24th consecutive home game.

No. 11 Oklahoma State 87, Texas 74: Markel Brown scored 27 points and Marcus Smart had 24, helping the host Cowboys beat the Longhorns.

Phil Forte added 14 points for Oklahoma State (13-2, 1-1 Big 12), which shot 54 percent from the field in the second half after struggling early.

No. 13 SDSU 69, Boise St. 65: Xavier Thames and Winston Shepard scored 16 points each for the Aztecs, who held on to defeat the visiting Broncos after Derrick Marks missed the potential-game winning shot with 4 seconds left.

San Diego State (13-1, 2-0 Mountain West) won its 12th straight game. It led by 18 points in the first half before allowing

Boise State (11-4, 1-1) to come almost all the way back in the closing minutes.

No. 14 Kentucky 85, Mississippi St. 63: James Young scored 26 points and the host Wildcats rallied from a halftime deficit to beat the Bulldogs.

Kentucky (11-3, 1-0 Southeastern Conference) shot 65 percent in the second half, and Mississippi State (10-4) went nearly 9 minutes without a field goal.

No. 15 Colorado 71, Washington State 70 (OT): Josh Scott scored eight of his 19 points in overtime in the Buffaloes' victory over the host Cougars.

Askia Booker added 18 points to help Colorado (14-2, 3-0 Pac-12) tie the second-best start in program history.

No. 18 Kansas 90, Oklahoma 83: Wayne Selden Jr. had a career-high 24 points and Perry Ellis added 22 points to help the visiting Jayhawks started Big 12 Conference play with a victory over the Sooners.

Kansas (10-4) won its conference opener for the 23rd straight year, a streak that began with the 1991-92 season.

No. 19 Massachusetts 66, Saint Joseph's 62: Chaz Williams scored eight of his 22 points in the final 6 minutes to lift the host Minutemen past the Hawks in the Atlantic-10 opener for both teams.

Maxie Esho scored 12 points, and Rashied Putney had 11 for the Minutemen (13-1).

NFL PLAYOFFS



Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson smiles as he stretches during practice Tuesday in Kirkland, Wash.

Explode: QB Wilson looking to return to MVP form against New Orleans

FROM BACK PAGE

and do the things we like to do in the running game, and play off of that. We're feeling pretty good about it, we're feeling like we know where we are.

At the heart of re-igniting the offense is getting Wilson closer to the passer he was during the middle part of the season. For four weeks in the middle third of the season, Wilson could not have played much better. He was efficient with his passes, capitalized on scoring opportunities, avoided sacks and took smart chances downfield.

And then came the final stretch, facing four of the best defenses in the NFL, when Wilson looked mortal. He held the ball too long. His efficiency dipped. He missed open receivers and the Seahawks struggled to sustain drives and capitalize in the red zone.

Those final four games have created some alarm as New Orleans returns Saturday for the NFC divisional playoff game.

"I think there are a couple of areas we can continue to improve. Continue to be a guy that is relentless in the red zone to get the ball to our playmakers," Wilson said. "That's the biggest thing to find the right guy at the right time."

It's not all on Wilson, but he certainly swooned in the final month. The four games prior, capped with his Dec. 2 game against the Saints where he threw for 310 yards and three touchdowns in Seattle's 34-7 win, Wilson was playing at his peak. During that four-game stretch — against Tampa Bay, Atlanta, Minnesota and New Orleans — Wilson com-

pleted 73 percent of his passes, averaged 261 yards passing, 10.44 yards per pass, nine touchdowns and a passer rating of 128.1.

It was the best four-game stretch of Wilson's young career. But then the slump arrived. Wilson threw for more than 200 yards only once. He had just four touchdowns and three interceptions, and was sacked 14 times. His yards per attempt dropped and his completion percentage was at 57.8 percent. That final stretch included the worst passing game of Wilson's career when he threw for just 108 yards in Seattle's 17-10 home loss to Arizona.

The argument that Seattle's offensive slump came against good defenses does hold credence. Over the final four weeks, the Seahawks faced the Nos. 5, 8, 6 and 15 overall defenses in the league. Arizona finished with the top run defense in the NFL, while San Francisco was fourth against the run and seventh against the pass.

"We were going against some of the top defenses in the league, specifically our division ... so you always have to take that into consideration," Golden Tate said. "We just have to keep doing us. We don't think we're being unproductive."

Offensive coordinator Darrell Bevell believes a chunk of the problem can be directly traced to Seattle's struggles on third down. The Seahawks were a combined 14 of 51 (27 percent) on third downs over the final four weeks.

That led to fewer long drives and less overall plays for the Seahawks offense. Seattle had just 50 offensive plays at San Francisco and 51 against Arizona.

"When we're in the 50s in total plays that's where our third downs have been hurting us. So we have to really work on that area," Bevell said. "Some of the red zone that we have looked at, we have to get back better there. We climbed all the way to top five or whatever and then we had some issues. So we have to make sure that we can finish drives when we get those opportunities down there."

Picking up the pace

Blount helps Pats' running backs peak at perfect time

By HOWARD ULMAN

The Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — LeGarrette Blount's first season with the New England Patriots started slowly.

It's picking up speed at the right time.

The 250-pound bulldozer charges into the first playoff game of his four NFL seasons after a breakout performance — a team-record 344 all-purpose yards, a personal-best 189 yards rushing and two touchdowns.

That helped the Patriots beat the Buffalo Bills 34-20 in the regular-season finale and clinch a first-round bye.

On Saturday night, the Patriots (12-4) face the Indianapolis Colts (12-5) in an AFC divisional-round game.

"We've been out here in the cold," Blount said after practice Wednesday with the temperature in the teens, "trying to get used to it and see how it's going to be for the game."

Bad weather wasn't a problem against Buffalo. In a game-long downpour, he had 36- and 35-yard touchdown runs and returned kickoffs 83 and 62 yards.

And Blount's 189 yards rushing were just 76 fewer than his total of 265 in his first eight games. He nearly doubled that in the next eight games with 507 yards as he learned the offense in his first season after being traded from Tampa Bay, which drafted him in 2010.

"I feel like I ran hard in the beginning also, but it's just as the season went on I got more comfortable," Blount said. "I just kind of figured out a lot more about the offense to be a little bit more successful."

Now he's part of a deep group of running backs with different styles.

Blount runs over defenders. Stevan Ridley cuts between them. Shane Vereen catches passes against them. Brandon Bolden does all that.

"It wears and tears on the defense," Blount said. "They get tired of hitting backs like me, like Rid, like Brandon. And they get tired of chasing Shane around. So I feel like if you do that to them for a while, sooner or later they're going to crack."

Combine that with Tom Brady's leadership and passing, and the defense has plenty to worry about.

Until this season, Blount had never returned a kickoff in the NFL. He's done it 17 times for the Patriots.

for an average of 29.1 yards despite having a much bigger body than most top returners.

Or because of it.

"Being my size definitely helps," Blount said. "I get to come out running full speed. And then another part of it is the kickoff team has to run all the way down there to tackle you and then once you break their line of defense then they have to turn around and chase you."

But he knows returners like Leon Washington and Devin Hester, two of the best in NFL history, have something extra.

"The 83-yarder I had probably would have been a touchdown with one of those guys," Blount said.

Brady isn't complaining about any of his backs.

"That's been a big strength of our team to take a lot of pressure off our passing game," he said.

"Guys that are able to go in [him] down," Vereen said.

"I wouldn't want to do it. That's why I play offense."

there and really impose their physical style of play against the other team, and the way we did it two weeks ago against Buffalo was awesome."

The Patriots rushed for a season-high 267 yards against the Bills; Ridley had 74.

Another big ground game could be coming against the Colts, who gave up the seventh most yards rushing in the league.

In their last three games, the Patriots have rushed for an average of 168.3.

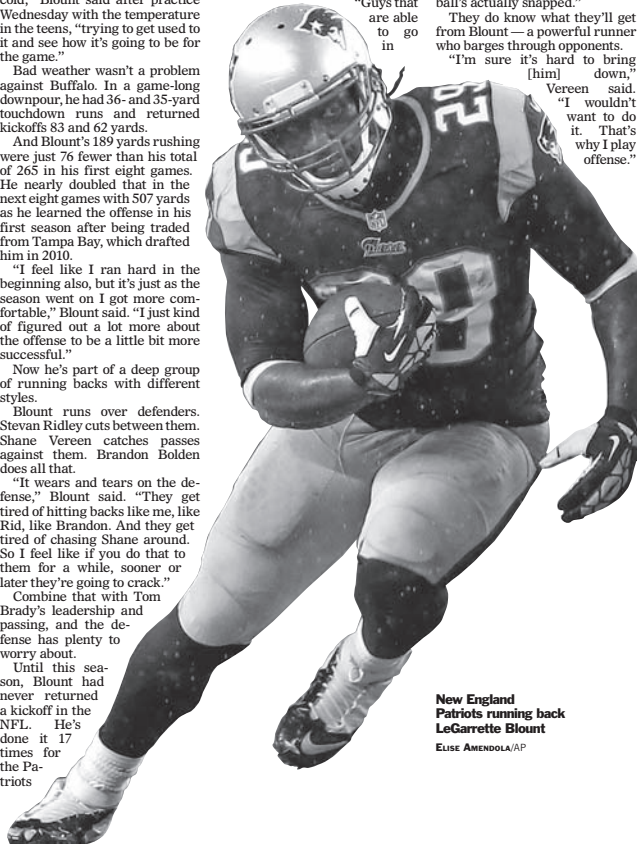
But if the Colts focus too much on stopping that, Vereen can catch a short pass and run. He had 47 receptions despite missing eight games with a broken wrist.

Defenses try to stop him by showing "different looks," he said, "trying to keep offenses on their toes, not really knowing what you're going to get until the ball's actually snapped."

They do know what they'll get from Blount — a powerful runner who barges through opponents.

"I'm sure it's hard to bring [him] down," Vereen said.

"I wouldn't want to do it. That's why I play offense."



New England Patriots running back LeGarrette Blount

ELISE AMENDOLA/AP

NFL/SPORTS BRIEFS

Redskins hire Bengals assistant Jay Gruden

Coach will be Washington's eighth in 16 seasons

By JOSEPH WHITE
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Jay Gruden has his first NFL head coaching gig, charged with ending the perpetual state of turmoil that has become the Washington Redskins.

He was hired Thursday after spending the last three seasons as the offensive coordinator of the Cincinnati Bengals, where his skill in helping to develop Andy Dalton will no doubt be of use when he takes on the task of grooming another young franchise quarterback, Robert Griffin III.

Gruden replaces Mike Shanahan, who was fired last week after a 3-13 season that ended with eight consecutive losses. The Redskins finished last in the NFC East during three of Shanahan's four seasons in Washington, a time marked by discord among ownership, quarterback and coach.

Gruden will become Dan Snyder's eighth coach in 16 seasons as an NFL owner. The span includes four winning seasons and seven last-place finishes. Unlike Shanahan, Gruden will not have final say over all football matters. He'll report to general manager Bruce Allen, who has taken charge of assembling the roster and other personnel decisions.

The 46-year-old Gruden has been largely

overshadowed by his more famous brother, Jon Gruden, who won a Super Bowl with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and is now an analyst on "Monday Night Football." But Jay Gruden has been a name on the rise because of his success with Dalton and the Bengals' offense.

Jay Gruden interviewed for multiple head coaching openings last year and had drawn interest from at least three other teams seeking to fill a head coaching vacancy this year. He interviewed with the Tennessee Titans on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, he became the last of six candidates to meet with Allen, ending a 10-day search. The Redskins had to wait until the Bengals played their first-round playoff game before Gruden could be interviewed. And it took a bad day from Gruden and Dalton — scoring only 10 points in a home loss to the San Diego Chargers — to make Gruden free to be hired this week.

Gruden had an inside track on the job because of his ties within the Washington organization. He was an assistant coach with Tampa Bay from 2002-08, where he worked at various times with Allen, Redskins defensive backs coach Raheem Morris and tight end coach Sean McVay. Gruden also coached under Redskins de-



AL BEHRMAN/AP

The Washington Redskins hired Jay Gruden, who spent the past three seasons as offensive coordinator of the Cincinnati Bengals, to become their head coach.

fensive coordinator Jim Haslett with the United Football League's Florida Tuskers in 2009.

Morris, McVay and Haslett were retained when Shanahan was fired, leaving it up to Gruden as to whether he will keep them on his new staff.

Gruden's No. 1 task will be to develop a solid relationship with Griffin, who regressed this season after winning the AP's Offensive Rookie of the Year award in 2012. Griffin returned from major knee surgery to start 13 games, but he publicly disagreed with some of Shanahan's decisions, struggled as a drop-back passer and was benched for the final three weeks.

There's no question Gruden has paid

his dues. He played quarterback for the Barcelona Dragons and the Sacramento Surge in the long-defunct World League of American Football in 1990, then went to the Arena Football League and began a playing and coaching career that was so successful it landed him in the AFL Hall of Fame in 1999.

He's been a head coach both the AFL and UFL, including two stints with the AFL's Orlando Predators from 1998-2001 and 2004-08 that included four appearances in the championship game and two league titles. In 2010, after Haslett left for the Redskins, Gruden was head coach and general manager of the Tuskers and led them to the UFL championship game.

Briefly

Source: Tide considering making Kiffin assistant

The Associated Press

Former Southern California coach Lane Kiffin is being considered by Alabama to replace offensive coordinator Doug Nussmeier, a person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity Thursday because Nussmeier's departure to Michigan was not yet official and the search for his replacement was not being made public.

Nussmeier left Alabama to take the same position with Michigan.

The person said there is mutual interest between Kiffin and Alabama coach Nick Saban. Kiffin has been out of work since being fired by USC in late September. He spent a week in Tuscaloosa, Ala., last month exchanging ideas with Tide coaches and observing Alabama.

Kiffin runs a pro-style offense that Saban favors.

The 38-year-old was 28-15 in three-plus seasons with USC. He was also head coach at Tennessee and for the Oakland Raiders.

CBS Sports.com first reported Kiffin was to meet with Alabama this week about the job.

Kiffin spent six seasons (2001-06) at USC under Pete Carroll as an assistant, including the final two as offensive coordinator. He also called plays during his time as a head coach. He spent one sea-

son at Tennessee (2009). He went 7-6 before leaving abruptly to replace Carroll with the Trojans.

Louisville hires Petrino for second stint as coach

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Louisville has hired Bobby Petrino for a second stint as the Cardinals' football coach.

The school made the announcement Thursday morning on its website after a unanimous vote by the school's athletic association. Petrino returns to the Cardinals after leading them to a 41-9 record from 2003-06. He replaces Charlie Strong, who left last weekend to accept the Texas job.

Petrino takes over a Cardinal program coming off a 12-1 finish and gearing up to join the Atlantic Coast Conference next season. He is 83-39 lifetime as a college coach and comes to Louisville after guiding Western Kentucky to an 8-4 finish in his only season with the Hilltoppers.

In other college football news: ■ Johnny Football is heading to the NFL.

Texas A&M quarterback Johnny Manziel declared for the NFL draft on Wednesday following two spectacular seasons in which he became the first freshman to win the Heisman Trophy and helped

the Aggies make a splash in their first year in the Southeastern Conference.

Rodman apologizes for comments in N. Korea

PYONGYANG, North Korea — Dennis Rodman apologized Thursday for comments he made in North Korea about a detained American missionary, saying he had been drinking and was under pressure as he organized a game with former NBA players.

The former basketball star issued the apology through publicist Jules Feiler in an email message to The Associated Press, a day after he sang "Happy Birthday" to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at the start of the friendly game.

Rodman has been slammed for not using his influence with Kim to help free Kenneth Bae, the missionary in poor health who is being confined in North Korea for "anti-state" crimes. In an interview with CNN on Tuesday, Rodman implied Bae was at fault.

"I want to apologize," Rodman said Thursday. "I take full responsibility for my actions. It had been a very stressful day. Some of my teammates were leaving because of pressure from their families and business associates.

My dreams of basketball diplomacy was quickly falling apart. I had been drinking. It's not an excuse but by the time the interview happened I was upset. I was overwhelmed. It's not an excuse, it's just the truth."

Rodman said he wanted to apologize first to Bae's family. "I'm very sorry. At this point I should know better than to make political statements. I'm truly sorry."

Bae, a Korean-American Christian missionary and tour operator based in China, has been detained for more than a year. North Korea sees missionary work as a threat to its authoritarian government.

Along with Rodman, the former NBA players included ex-All Stars Kenny Anderson, Cliff Robinson and Vin Baker.

Sabres introduce Murray as new GM

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Buffalo Sabres have hired Tim Murray to be their general manager.

Murray, who spent the past seven seasons as the Senators' assistant GM, was formally introduced during a press conference on Thursday, and takes over the task of rebuilding Ottawa's Atlantic Division rival.

Murray has 20 years of NHL experience after breaking in as a scout with the Detroit Red Wings

in 1993. He is the nephew of Senators general manager Bryan Murray, who has mentored him throughout his career.

Murray takes over a team in transition after Regier and coach Ron Rolston were both fired in mid-November. They took the blame for the Sabres sitting in last in the NHL standings and after getting off to a franchise-worst 4-15-1 start.

Mattingly, Dodgers reach 3-year extension

LOS ANGELES — Don Mattingly will be back as manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers next season with a new three-year contract that takes him through 2016, quieting speculation that his future with the club was somehow in doubt.

A person familiar with the agreement, speaking on condition of anonymity because no statements were authorized, said Mattingly is getting a raise from the \$1.4 million he was to earn next season under his old deal. By comparison, Yankees manager Joe Girardi, entering his seventh season in New York, is starting a \$16 million, four-year agreement after completing a \$9 million, three-year deal.

Mattingly had sought the stability of a multiyear deal.

WINTER OLYMPICS

Five women to know

With Vonn out, these ladies could be stars in Sochi

By HOWARD FENDRICH

The Associated Press

Lindsey Vonn's announcement that she will miss the Sochi Olympics because of a right knee injury leaves a glaring gap for other athletes to fill.

As a star of Alpine skiing, Vonn was sure to get plenty of attention — from other athletes, from the media, from fans. As an American, she was sure to be one of the central figures in NBC's televised coverage in the

United States.

"We wish we still had Lindsey there, but we don't," NBC Sports Group chief Mark Lazarus said Tuesday. "That's the nature of sports. ... Lots of stars, unfortunately, get hurt."

So with Vonn now gone from these Winter Games, there is room for someone else to become a medalist, a household name, an international star during the 2½ weeks of competition.

Here's a look at five women to know in Sochi, where the opening ceremony is a month away:

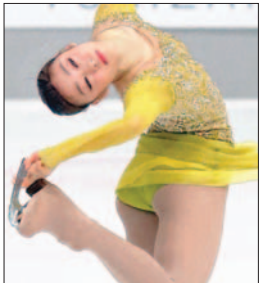


GIOVANNI AULETTA/AP

1 Mikaela Shiffrin, U.S., Alpine Skiing: She's young and American and very, very good, a solid formula at Olympic time.

All of 18, Shiffrin already is the best slalom ski racer around, and she has a world championship and World Cup discipline title to prove it. From Colorado, which Vonn also calls home nowadays, Shiffrin has been tagged with the label of "Next Big Thing" in her sport, picked as the World Cup rookie of the year in 2012.

Shiffrin earned her second slalom win of the current season Sunday, at Bormio, Italy.



DARRK BANDIC/AP

2 Kim Yu-na, South Korea, Figure Skating: Already a huge star in her own country thanks to a gold medal at Vancouver four years ago, she very well could broaden her fan base if she can accomplish something only two other women have — repeat as Olympic champion in figure skating. Katarina Witt did it in 1984 and 1988, and Sonja Henie won in 1928, 1932 and 1936.

Not only are there no American women expected to challenge Kim for the gold medal, no one from any country is likely to make things tough on her.



RICK BOWMER/AP

3 Heather Richardson, U.S., Speedskating: A former inline skater from North Carolina, Richardson "could be a real Olympic breakout star," was the way Ted Morris, U.S. Speedskating's executive director, put it a couple of months ago.

He's biased, of course, but he also might be right if Richardson becomes the first American women's long track medalist since 2002, when Chris Witty won gold in the 1,000. Richardson was the overall World Cup champion at that distance.

If it's not Richardson in short-track skating, it might be the personable Brittany Bowe, another ex-inline skater who was a point guard at Florida Atlantic.

Their sport also features the sort of compelling story TV producers like to set to music: Claudia Pechstein of Germany, who will turn 42 during the Olympics, her sixth Winter Games, and has won nine medals already. Oh, and there's this, too: Her career was tainted by a two-year doping ban that kept her from competing in Vancouver; she never tested positive for drugs, but was suspended based on irregular blood levels.



MANU FERNANDEZ/AP

4 Lindsey Jacobellis, U.S., Snowboarding: Hers could be the sort of "redemption" tale we hear a lot during the Olympics.

A seven-time champion in snowboardcross at the Winter X Games, she's never brought home gold from the plain ol' Winter Games — but she sure is famous for a flashy grab of her board on the final jump in 2006 that sent her tumbling, and turned a certain gold medal into a silver medal. That move might have been "cool," but it was absolutely not needed. In 2010, she wound up fifth.



CARLO ALLEGRI/AP

5 Julie Chu, U.S., Hockey: A forward who played at Harvard, Chu already is getting face time in American television ads.

At 31, she's the oldest member of the U.S. team, and she'll be heading to her fourth Olympics in search of her first gold, after already collecting two silvers and a bronze.

Women's hockey could draw extra eyeballs this time around if the heated rivalry between the United States and Canada continues in Sochi: They've engaged in a series of brawls, even in exhibitions.

SPORTS



No Love lost

T-Wolves' star forward blasts team after latest loss | **Page 27**

NFL

Seattle ready to explode?

Wilson, Seahawks' offense primed for big game Saturday

By TIM BOOTH
The Associated Press

The last time Russell Wilson played like he was pushing to be included in the talk for MVP, he dissected the New Orleans Saints with one of the best performances of his career.

Since that December night, Wilson and the Seattle Seahawks scuffled toward the conclusion of the season, raising concerns that a stumbling offense could leave them vulnerable as the playoffs arrive.

"We weren't able to stay at the same level of production that we had maybe prior to that, but you'll see," Seattle coach

Pete Carroll said. "Hopefully, we can play like we want to, which is to play a really good balanced attack

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- Blount leads deep group of Patriots running backs, Page 29



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